

John Doe and Ronja Vogl are now friends

A virtual self-portrait

„The fact that we constantly have to choose is characteristic for the individualized society of today. Be it cereals, washing powder, profession or life-style – there is a constant excess in supply of alternatives. This also affects our self-image: we constantly have to reinvent ourselves.“¹

Point of departure of my work is the question how postmodern individuals portray themselves in virtual space and therefore what actually is a modern portrait. My own facebook network serves as basis for the series of paintings.

With the spread of digital cameras and web 2.0, self-portrayal has become a mass phenomenon: On websites such as facebook, YouTube and flickr, people give insights into their private lives. At the same time some use pseudonyms not to show their real identity. In cyberspace we are also connected (“friends”) with people we do not even know in real life.

John Doe and Ronja Vogl are now friends is an examination of identity and this new way of self-portrayal as well as of virtual social space and social networks. It analyzes how people present themselves on their profile pictures and what kind of statements they typically post.

It turns out that there is a certain repetition in formats – besides classical portrait pictures directly facing the camera, pictures of mere body details, the subject evading the outsider’s view, blurred pictures, child photographs and pictures of objects are popular. Posting contents range from meaningless observations on everyday life to statements on locations, professional activities, or politics, or event advertisements.

Looking at the painted pictures of facebook portraits and statements, we can observe what happens to the fleeting virtual material when it is transformed into painting. An instant is frozen – an instantaneous picture of the identity of a constantly changing subject, a normal person, is captured and presented almost like an icon.

Painting has a totally different temporality than virtual communication: already the act of painting itself is much more time-consuming than that of taking a photograph or posting a statement on facebook – before the painting is even finished, the posted statement has already changed. And while the painting stays, our virtual world continues to constantly change.

The sum of portraits of facebook friends doubtlessly also paints a portrait of the person in the centre of this network – thus my own self-portrait.

The concept of *John Doe and Ronja Vogl are now friends* was enlarged for its exhibition in public space in the framework of *true stories*, inviting artists to renew their facebook profiles and statements and to themselves translate them artistically. In the course of the exhibition, the resulting works of art will be printed on posters and fixed in the free spaces between the existing paintings. In case of interest please contact Ronja Vogl on facebook.

¹ Max Celko in „Medien und Identität“, Das Kulturmagazin – Du 794 – März 2009