

Motel Hell

Popular culture is what hits most of us most of the time. While art reserves for itself the freedom to think about alternatives and critique the system, it could be argued that its greatest effect is when it crosses over into mass culture and infects it. Otto Berchem, like others of his generation, found his route to art partly through the liberating alternative that punk rock, underground movies, trash TV and fanzine amateurism represented. They wore their resistance on their sleeves but were as dismissive of high culture as of the mainstream. Now, Berchem takes those inspirations and seizes particular moments that might offer ways of recuperating their imaginative possibility. His work subjects art to the challenge of the pop alternative, while retaining a critical distance towards those very moments of inspirations in popular culture. Whether adapting games shows, excavating early reality TV or drawing on long forgotten B-movies, Berchem points out the possibility that it is the creativity locked away in such popular genres that the art context could release. His idea seems to be to twist, even radicalize, pop in order to show it in a new light and understand how it might operate on critical levels. In short, perhaps, Berchem's work suggests a partial misquotation of John Lennon: 'culture is what happens when we're busy making other plans'.

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