

Nik Nowak
12 Töne

February 5, 2021 – April 10, 2021

The gallery alexander levy is pleased to present *12 Töne* (12 Sounds), a new series of ceramic objects by artist Nik Nowak from 5th February to 10th April 2021.

Nik Nowak focuses on the affective dimensions and potential of sound and space in his multi-media interdisciplinary work that re-engineers the formal boundaries between installations, performances, sculptures, films or paintings. He has become renowned for his use of sound as an identifying and socially binding element as well as sound systems as cultural transmitters and acoustic weapons.

For *12 Töne*, Nik Nowak turns, for the first time, to the medium of ceramics. Whereas his sound sculptures in previous years (such as *Panzer* 2010 or *The Mantis* 2019) were technical, highly complex, machine-like constructions of wood, steel and several electro-acoustic elements, the new ceramic series is shaped by reduction, physicality, intuition and directness, although still markedly part of the continuum of his research and praxis. By rolling prepared sheets, Nowak creates funnel-shaped horns that are subsequently subjected to processes of deformation, folding, bending, squashing and invaginations. The resultant ceramic horns are reminiscent of antique ear trumpets, the trumpets, in the Biblical mythos, that were sounded to tear down the Walls of Jericho, and of megaphones, as well as organic anatomical extensions, or the auditory canal itself. In their formal structure, each object inherently has a smaller, and a larger opening with a horn section in between that is more or less deformed. They consequently produce varying effects of acoustic amplification – listening to the inside of the horn with their spectral resonances, results in a considerable change in external sounds. The background noises, or acoustic envelope, that continuously surround us emanating, for example, from wind, distant voices or traffic, and which we usually ignore, seem louder and more in the foreground.

The focus in the exhibition *12 Töne*, however, is not itself on sound but rather the sculptural plane and the exploration of the resonating relationship or, more properly, the relationship of resonance, between sound and space. While the sculptural character of the objects recalls a post-Minimalist vocabulary, a manual, handcrafted component is visible in the ceramic horns. Alongside the conscious limitation to fewer compositional parameters, a gestural and intuitive working process manifests in the use of materials. The strictly black and white horns look like artefacts. Seemingly slick and simple at first glance, further observation reveals an oscillating relationship between inner and outer and an amorphous relationship of female and male forms. Mouths, ears and lips appear by association and the openings become all-absorbing black holes.

Whether the horns in *12 Töne* are about ear trumpets, megaphones, the visual or material enlargement of the diminutive scale of the human auditory canal, or simply miniature versions of the gigantic loudspeaker modules with which Nowak's works most usually engage, remains undecided. Similar to a laboratory situation, the ceramics are presented on stark aluminium surfaces as if an examination is soon to be conducted.

A series of new collages and photographic works by the artist will accompany the ceramic sculptures.

Nik Nowak, born 1980 in Mainz, studied at the Universität der Künste (University of the Arts) in Berlin. In 2007 he took part in Xiang Jing's sculpture class at the Shanghai Normal University, China. He was a master's student of Lothar Baumgarten.

Nik Nowak's works have been shown in national and international institutions and exhibitions including KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Marta Herford, Herford; Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg; Philharmonie Paris, France; Muzeul National de Art al Romaniei, Bucharest, Romania; and Art Basel Miami Beach, USA.