

Josef Hofer



## THE SCHIELE INCIDENT

**Recent Works by Josef Hofer**

Christian Berst Art Brut

95 Rivington, New York

February 19 – April 12, 2015

For nearly two decades, **Josef Hofer** has been producing drawings at a feverish pace in his studio at Lebenshilfe Oberosterreich in Reid, Austria. Born deaf and without the ability to speak, his midlife endeavor into art making has, now at age 70, proved fruitful. His bright, sensual drawings of the nude male figure, enclosed in meticulously rendered layers of rigid, orange and yellow rectangular frames have been widely exhibited and his work continues to excel technically and develop thematically. The New York location of Christian Berst Art Brut has mounted a sizeable number of the artist's recent works examining his, at first frustrated, relationship with the paintings of famed Austrian Expressionist, Egon Schiele (1890–1918).

Even before seeing his paintings, Hofer's figures drew comparison to Schiele's, for good reason. Both utilise lines that are at once frenetic and graceful, sensual and barbed, to trace the contours of their nudes. They both make work that is highly erotic, seeing sex and its relation to the human form in a manner that is exploratory, often working from their own bodies. They share an uncanny ability to make

images that are deeply relatable and absolutely vulnerable.

Hofer's initial reaction to Schiele was one of directed annoyance. A well-meaning collector gifted him a book of Schiele's work, a kind gesture unfortunately met with disinterest by the artist, indicated by his flinging of the tome at a nearby cupboard. The centre's director shelved the book, without expectation that the notoriously stubborn artist would take it up again. However, after several months, Hofer, on his own accord, took the book down, cracked the still fresh spine, and revelled in his new discovery. Over the course of several years, Hofer developed a special attraction to about 15 of the drawings, which he copied meticulously and repeatedly, transposing them into his own hand, and confining them in his signature orange and yellow frames

What is remarkable about this show is its documentation of two artists, separated by time and coming from radically different backgrounds, who have come to similar conclusions through independent methods. Hofer's work has benefitted considerably from his encounter with Schiele, and the effect is reciprocal. At the apex of this meeting are these works, which stand alone as works of art in their own right, the fruit of a convergent evolution finally realised and come full circle.

**Paul Brown**