

Pictet & Cie Corporate Art Collection  
Private tour at Moor House, 120 London Wall

Swiss Made – A truly Swiss affair



On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> May I was privileged to receive a private tour of the Pictet & Cie corporate art collection located at Moor House in Moorgate. The astute, thoughtful and elegant Loa Haagen Pictet led the tour. She is an art historian, curator, writer and previous jury member of the Prix Pictet, a prize for contemporary photography.

Pictet & Cie is regarded as Switzerland's largest independent private bank specialising in asset and wealth management. It was established in Geneva in 1805 where its headquarters still remain. They have offices in Europe, North America and Asia. In London, one of their offices is within the impressive and striking Moor House, designed by the renowned architect Norman Foster. The building was completed in 2005. The large amount of wall space and meeting rooms provide the opportunity to merge business and art. Since 2004, Loa Haagen Pictet has been responsible for building up Pictet & Cie's Art Collection. She brought with her a wealth of experience in art advising and curating. She graduated with a gold medal from Copenhagen University and has worked for Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Copenhagen amongst other impressive institutions. In 1997, she settled in Switzerland where she worked as a freelance curator, lecturer, author and gallery director. She has worked at The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva.

The ethos of the collection is to collect Swiss art from 1805 (Pictet's founding year) to the present day. However, the artists can be born in, from or linked to Switzerland. The aim is to, 'present the wide range of influences that make up the

Swiss art scene'. Switzerland as a country is very global in nature and multicultural due to the movements of people in and out of the country. Loa Haagen Pictet herself is Danish by birth but has made Switzerland her home, which just exemplifies the point. Pictet and Cie's collecting ethos is more focused and specific than a collection such as Deutsche banks that aims to create a global collection collecting artists from all over the world correlating with its worldwide presence. Loa Pictet explained that one reason for such a manoeuvre is due to funds as their allocated finances put aside for collecting art is nowhere near as high as other collections such as Deutsche Bank again. Thus, they decided to collect with a focus and stay true to their Swiss roots and in the process carve out their own unique image. Loa Pictet emphasised that their aim is to buy the best artwork by the artists they collect. Again, partially due to funds they cannot collect in bulk and thus this very much adheres to the quality over quantity approach. Once the artwork of the highest quality has been evaluated and targeted they begin the purchasing process whether this be from the artist directly, or through a gallery or auction house.

The artworks at Moor House occupy the reception area, hallways and boardrooms. They are accessible to all staff on the floor and one is invited to read about the artist's work through the accompanying wall labels and texts. Loa led us around the artworks pointing out and explaining key examples with pose and purpose.

One such central series of artworks are the double monochrome triptychs by the important and respected Swiss artist Alain Huck. The paintings '*Untitled (Respite)*' 2001 were created through the usage of a particular system, or one of his, 'aesthetic experiments'. In this system dice were rolled and each number related to a specific colour, which was then placed on a predetermined half space on the canvas. This colour was then painted onto the canvas with two dice rolls per painting as one can see below. Thus, the work plays on chance and colour - both of which are created via the artist's hand. The works are drained of any subjective, figurative or emotional content at all and are replaced by colour and surface offering a, 'smooth physical reality'. Only the runs or drips off the edge of the canvas disturb the viewer from the sensual and copious paint that inhabits the surface. Such an effect is created through the usage of synthetic varnish until any human gestures disappear. The work is a result of chance and randomness but following this the artist works to strict rules. The artist deliberately uses a borrowed style from geometric abstraction, which one could argue leaves the work, 'emptied of all originality'. The work was created in and is still in constant states of antithesis, moreover the reworked canvas occupies a strong formal presence yet also a state of fragility. Alain Huck was born in Vevey in 1957 and still lives and works in Switzerland. He is co-founder of the M/2 Space, an exhibition space for young artists, and has participated in the 'dynamism of the Swiss art scene since the 1980s'. He had exhibited widely in a number of esteemed institutions such as the George Pompidou Centre in Paris.



Another important artwork is the enthralling diptych of photographs '*Cern*' 1997 by Nicolas Faure. The works are C-type prints on plexi-glass. The works are photographs of sections of the Hadron Collider, which is situated on the border between France and Switzerland. It is the world's largest and most powerful particle collider. Furthermore, it is the largest, most complex experimental facility ever built as well as the largest single machine in the world. The project's ambition and aim is to 'crack the code of the physical world'. Behind the impressive objective lies human endeavour and inevitably mess. Faure shows the human aspects behind such a machine, it is not perfect at all. Furthermore, the wires appear almost makeshift with simple plastic cable ties holding together the mass of cables, which underlie the machine and its capability to function at all. One can see the mass of elements that are incorporated and involved in such an enormous human endeavour. The work appears abstract and painterly. It is as if the wires and components are like brush strokes on a canvas with dashes of intense colour and movement. It is no wonder Nicolas Faure has been coined by many as the 'Gerhard Richter of the photography world'. The artist was born in Switzerland in 1949 and lives and works in Geneva. Many important institutions including the Museum of Modern Art in New York have acquired his photographs.



In a larger boardroom Valentin Carron's large work *'Minnesota'* 2007 is present. The work is made out of the everyday and reused materials tarpaulin and plastic straps – similar to the ones portrayed in Faure's photographs. Carron is interested in the processes involved in the reappropriation of signs and images intertwined within our culture. The work is a hybrid of different styles and influences. There are obvious similarities to Op Art with the radiating and pulsating image, yet the image was taken from the front cover of a novel the artist discovered in a second hand bookshop. Thus, even the original reference image is recycled. The transformation and reappropriation is by no means perfect, much unlike the mathematical rigour of Op Art. Instead, it is make shift and purposefully aware of its own artificiality. Such a feeling is heightened with the black frame, which stretches the tarpaulin. On closer inspection one realises that the artist created it by using galvanised-steel tubes simply arranged in a rectangle. Much of his work is a reference to the fragility behind systems and constructs. Carron's work is, 'more akin to pastiche than celebration, point up the machinery behind the set of symbols surrounding the product of any human endeavour'. The artist relates such human endeavour back to his native Switzerland and questions it as he, 'underscores the construction of Switzerland as a nation around a reinvented, often falsified folklore'.

