

Book review by Marc Wellmann

Jürgen Trimborn's new Breker's biography is, for sure reading to be recommended. A portrayal that is brilliant in wording and abundant in facts. For the very first time Arno Breker's life is reviewed on the basis of scientific, verifiable sources. Every reader who is interested in contemporary 20th century art, will profit from this book. Arno Breker's life is a prime example of the fatal entanglement of art and power. His meteoric career in the second half of the 1930s and treatment he received in post-war Germany, both reflect on key terms of cultural-political and aesthetic discourse, which continue today. This was confirmed by the immense media response to the Breker exhibition in Schwerin in 2006. Trimborn's book is the recent result of on-going debate that has flared up again on one of the most controversial and well-known German artists of the 20th century.

The author draws a picture of an unscrupulous careerist, who deliberately recommends himself to the new German authorities. This enabled this little known sculptor from the Parisian artistic milieu, to become one of the most influential and best-paid personalities of the Nazi art world. It resulted in closeness to Hitler, Goebbels and Speer and the many advantages, starting with the "birthday gift" castle Jäckelsbruch, continuing by the state-funded construction of a studio building in Berlin-Dahlem and the setting up of "Arno Breker sculpture workshops" in Wriezen, and then finally, leading to the active acquisition of former Jewish properties in Paris and Berlin. Corruptibility and benefit from the regime - beyond all measure, is the central theme of this book.

Trimborn can prove that Breker moved from Paris to Berlin in 1933 and intentionally joined the Nazi party, contrary to his later declarations. Once there he received the favour of the "leader" and astronomical fees for his work. The whereabouts of these assets have remained, since 1945, largely unexplained.

Had the tribunal Donauwörth possessed even a fraction of this information, Breker would not have emerged from his de-Nazification process as a "fellow traveller", but would have been classified, at least, as "beneficiary". Trimborn is convinced of this and elaborates on the judicial process and associated press reports.

Trimborn succeeds in tracing and accurately and plausibly describing Breker's life journey. On the basis of Trimborn's other biographies, amongst others Leni Riefenstahl and Johannes Heesters, and further to his dissertation on the memorial debates in the Federal Republic of Germany, he can be seen as a specialist in the field of historical, social and political disruptions of the last century.

The author has written an explicitly critical biography. The "not authorised" status in the

preface is presented and justified with "pride". The fact, that Trimborn did not receive permission to look into the artist's written heritage, is the source of his uncompromisingly, sharp perspective which refutes many previously circulating euphemisms and misrepresentations. Simultaneously Trimborn loses himself at several points, in unproven speculation on the sculptor's homosexual inclinations. This undermines the original enlightening approach but fills the long text with suspense.

Another weakness of this publication lies in the art historical evaluation of Breker's work. In other words, the lack of thorough discussion on the mutability of an artist whose style substantially changed at two influential turning points (1933 and 1945).

To clarify this, was certainly not the priority of this biographical project. But ultimately, we learn too little about the art discussion of the era, contrary to, for example, to the propaganda film "Venus in court", from 1941 where it can be comprehended through the figure of the sculptor, "Peter Brake" (!) - A film that was not mentioned by Trimborn at all.

Furthermore the following statement, in terms of pan-European figurative-classical sculpture tradition, from which Breker's vocabulary is fed and to which artists like Georg Kolbe, Fritz Klimsch or Richard count on as well, is a questionable generalisation or at least, requires an extra commentary: "Alfred Rosenberg invoked the Arno Brekers figures, created after 1936, as exemplary in terms of Nordic-Germanic beauty ideal '. Every artist working in Germany at those times were aware that Hitler's regime expected him to actively participate in the "design" of the new type of person"(P. 199)

However, these are only small flaws in this highly meritorious research. A critical assessment to Arno Breker's work still needs to be written. For this purpose, Jürgen Trimborns biography has contributed very important groundwork. This book will remain standard reading on the subject for a long time to come.

Marc Wellmann, Exhibition Director, Georg-Kolbe-Museum and Chairman Bernhard-Heiliger-Foundation, Berlin

Jürgen Trimborn: Arno Breker. Der Künstler und die Macht. Die Biographie. Aufbau Verlag, Berlin 2011, 712 Seiten, 29,99 Euro, ISBN 978-3-351-02728-5