



TIROLER KÜNSTLER·INNENSCHAFT  
TYROLEAN ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION

KUNSTPAVILLON  
NEUE GALERIE INNSBRUCK

## Peter Niedertscheider ROOM DIVIDERS (RAUMTEILER)

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Neue Galerie Innsbruck

In general, a “room divider” is understood as a mobile element or piece of furniture used to divide and subdivide interiors. Occasionally marketed as privacy screens, room dividers can create more private zones within an interior. As the title of the exhibition as well as a series of works, *Room Dividers (Raumteiler)* become a trope in Peter Niedertscheider’s work. In the exhibited pieces, he divides the pictorial spaces using a grid that seems to challenge the rooms’ scale, especially through the horizontal lines. These are spaces that are constructed and simultaneously dissolved again in the individual reliefs, opening intimate glimpses into private everyday scenes. In addition, the works in the series *Room Dividers* bear witness to Niedertscheider’s long-lasting, intense engagement with the material stone and its diverse processing possibilities. Here, he combines traditional with modern processing methods, which means that a wide range of stone processing techniques are represented in the exhibition, from baroque stone etching to modern laser engraving.

In the very first gallery room, works can be seen in which Peter Niedertscheider increasingly handles surfaces and so begins to combine different types of stone with each other. Among other things, this creates very flat areas that open out through the different colours and thicknesses of the individual stones and their assemblage. In **Room Divider/Curtain 1**, the central perspective directs the viewers’ gaze to the middle of the picture, where they look directly over the shoulder of an exhibition visitor at an implied portrait. The zigzag hatching on the white stone to the left of the picture suggests an open curtain, while to the lower right the image is bordered by a cuboid decorated with floral engraving. This play with different types of stone and their respective qualities becomes even clearer in **Room Divider/Curtain 3**. On the left is a bonsai milled from a slate veneer, on the right a bright white curtain revealing a still life with a vase of flowers, some fruit, and a window to the outside. The open curtain allows us to look through two picture planes into the far distance, and so with

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relatively few and simple means, Niedertscheider creates a tremendous effect of depth. In the next work in the exhibition, **Room Divider/Curtain 2**, there is true interplay between surface, structure and depth: here, relief works complement the staging of surface and space. This interplay is continued in **Room Divider/Curtain 4**. Particularly the open curtain, which allows the visitor to look into the private room depicted, is captivating due to its assumed lightness, its sweep, and the illusion of materiality created by the etching of the stone.

The motif of the curtain recurs frequently in this series of works. In the works exhibited in the Neue Galerie, however, it does not veil or protect from prying eyes but reveals the scene and allows the viewer insights into domestic settings.

Peter Niedertscheider's most striking stylistic device, however, remains the *rilievo schiacciato*, the "flattened" relief, which originated in the Italian Renaissance and in which Donatello already demonstrated impressively that a sculptural image can also produce a decisive light-dark contrasts.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly clear in the next two rooms of the gallery. Unlike before, here the individual images always consist of a single slab of stone that Niedertscheider works on sculpturally. The limestone and marble images in this series of works are divided by a grid and thus structured, at least on the surface; at the same time, the complexity of the pictorial motifs is increased. What is at the front, what is at the back of the space, and where does it end? In particular, the double function of the pattern dividing the image and the shelves positioned at the front enables a complex interplay of front and back picture planes.

Objects from everyday life and quotations from art history as well as people, animals and plants serve Niedertscheider as a means to an end, allowing us to infer their position on the basis of their size. And even though the individual motifs communicate, it is not always obvious at first glance in what way they do so, and what relationships they have with each other. And so it happens that finally, like picture puzzles, the images invite us to look more closely, almost with a voyeuristic eye, despite their privacy. Is there a naked man crouching at the back of **Room Divider 10**, his arm casually draped over his knee, or is the figure merely a bookend, after all? The importance of stone as a material to the artist is made clear by the juxtaposition of the different series of works in the show at the Neue Galerie. The contrasts and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Iris Wenderholm, „Hell/Dunkel/Grau. Rilievo schiacciato und chiaroscuro“, in Claudia Lehmann, Norberto Gramaccini, Johannes Rößler, Thomas Dittelbach (eds.): *Chiaroscuro als ästhetisches Prinzip: Kunst und Theorie des Helldunkels 1300-1550*, Berlin 2018, p. 270.

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play with light and dark are perceived differently in the dark limestone slabs, for example. Here, the interaction between surface and space, foreground and background, and the tensions created by the arrangement of the individual components in the pictorial space come into their own again. Furthermore, Niedertscheider adopts the most modern technology, inserting an image of Botticelli's Venus, for example. Whether it is an image, or a person looking at us from the room behind remains ambiguous.

Finally, in the last room, **Room Divider 15** illustrates once more the special nature of the *relievo schiacciato*: from a distance, it seems almost tone-in-tone with the white wall, yet a remarkable depth unfolds in the image when viewed close-up, despite the shallowness of the relief.

In Peter Niedertscheider's *Room Dividers*, the depictions of private rooms with intimate insights into the everyday life of their inhabitants, coupled with the impossibility of hierarchising the objects depicted – both within the pictorial space and on the level of meaning – as well as the consciously selected formats of the individual works, ultimately culminate in a process of democratisation of stone sculpting.

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