

Diner, Eli. “Jörg Immendorff”, Artforum, November 22, 2013.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Jörg Immendorff

HANNAH HOFFMAN GALLERY
1010 N. Highland Avenue
October 4–December 7

The brown one squeezes the yellow one, tugs at rolls of fat, and pinches a ballooning cheek. Eyes shut and red lips purse as if breathing a sigh of deep pleasure: it's an ecstatic, flabby embrace. These are nice babies.



“Nice” was a watchword for Jörg Immendorff in the 1960s. “Artists be nice to the people”; “Be nice to everybody”; “You are nice”: slogans promulgated by Immendorff and his performers while donning baby masks. This welcomed exhibition of the artist’s early work, spanning from 1964 to 1969, demonstrates the development of his corpus of repeating cartoon figures and symbols—cute and grotesque, cloying and critical. Immendorff issued his corpulent babies in several colors; in addition to the painting described above, *Yellow and Brown Babies*, 1967, the exhibition offers a yellow pair soaping each other in the bath (*Zwei Gelbe Babies*, 1967). These, like his affability dicta, directed giddy scorn at those infantilizing institutions of art and the state.

The years covered by the show saw the artist become increasingly committed to radical politics, vocal in his opposition to capitalism and the American war in Vietnam, and a central figure in the student uprisings in Düsseldorf. Meanwhile, his work—farcical in tone and childlike in articulation—turned to an increasingly inner logic. The year 1968 saw the advent of Lidl, the name under which Immendorff and Chris Reinecke undertook actions and teach-ins. “The word originates in baby talk,” Immendorff explained. “Lidl-lidl-lidl, etc. The sound of a baby rattle.” In another account, the artist offered this equation: “Lidl=phonetic form. The word Lidl is used as a sign and is defined by the actions of the participants.” The definitions share a confusion of language and action, and through the word’s repetition in paintings and performances it assumed the double character of mantra and platitude.

– Eli Diner