

Helen Feifel

Visual Truths Are Blunt

18.1.–29.2.2020

The combination of aspects of performance and body art, stage design, fashion design, photography, sculpture, and abstract painting is characteristic of Helen Feifel's new series of painted photographs titled "Stages" and her film "Infinite". The production process is always complex and time-consuming, integrating forgotten techniques and combining popular and high culture in a seemingly natural way. At the same time, Helen Feifel's works possess a directness in the sense of the current exhibition title "Visual Truths Are Blunt," a quote from the underground filmmaker Jack Smith.



Stage 4, 2020

painted photograph
187×138 cm

The central motif of all pieces is the harlequin, who qua definition "moves between the worlds and whose masking allows infinite transformations." The first masking of the body is always the clothes covering it, per se a game with different identities. For her works, Helen Feifel designs and produces costumes that are unique pieces featuring a stylistic collage of such as traditional costumes and avant-gardist designs by Issey Miyake, Alexander McQueen or Comme des Garçons.

Helen Feifel's work has been highly acclaimed early on, with solo exhibitions at the Museum Mönchehaus Goslar in 2014, the Kunstverein Braunschweig in 2015 and the Langen Foundation Düsseldorf in 2016. The Sprengel Museum dedicated a room to the artist in the show "In the Picture: Overpainted Photography" in 2019, and in 2018 a group of Feifel's works were on view at the Kunsthalle Bonn in the exhibition "Deutschland ist keine Insel. Die Bundeskunstsammlung." Helen Feifel's combination of various disciplines led to a joint project with the fashion house Dior in 2016.

Her series Stages, consisting of large-format, painted photographs, shows an impressively pointed staging of the body through the combination of performative costuming, photography and painting. Feifel's mises-en-scène form a "counter-image" to present-day social

standardizations and restrictions of body images. With Feifel, the body is “veiled” by elaborately designed costumes. Gender roles become fluid in a playful manner, as in the films of the underground filmmaker Jack Smith, who in the 1960s paid tribute to the queer and drag scene with his protagonists in oneiric masks. By using painting, Helen Feifel shifts the parameters of reality in a markedly unique way. As an abstract “vis-a-vis,” the painting covers, presses or rhythmizes the bodies photographed as objects, constructing an “image” beyond unambiguous definitions.

The 11-minute video Infinite (2017-2020) is based on 174 individual photographs that Helen Feifel produced over a period of three years exclusively for this film. She stages her body dressed in a harlequin’s costume as a dancing figurine on a stage of balloons, photographed with a self-timer. In the next step, the individual black-and-white photos were painted using a historical colorizing technique consisting of color glaze based on egg-white. As opposed to the original function of colorizing, color develops the independence of abstract painting with Feifel. There are “flashes” of references to historical predecessors such as the avant-garde dancer Loie Fuller, who became known in the 1930s for her “serpentine dance” captured in colorized short films and described as “abstract dance.” However, with the sound collage consisting in the synthesis of technoid and everyday sounds composed by the artist, Helen Feifel inevitably places the film “Infinite” in the here and now of the present.



Infinite, 2017-2020

HD video, color, sound
11:30 min, loop,
Edition of 3 + 1 AP

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