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SHANNON BOOL
Major Arcana
Figures of Fate or Remedies?
5/17–6/30/2009

In face of Shannon Bool's work until now, it is only logical that tarot would suddenly be at the centre of one of her exhibitions. At once a game and a fortune-telling tool, the combination of handicraft and artistic skills, of hopes and strokes of fate, make tarot a perfect metaphor of Bool's working method. With sublime melancholy and a precise eye, she develops an interwoven system of references, values and intentions that are comparable with the frames of reference and ideologies of specialised areas of knowledge. Yet with Bool, these areas of knowledge – like in esotericism or art – are not linear and easy to see through, but mysterious and encrypted. However, if one engages in this tour de force through the theatre of life, a field of tension is opened, in which fixed categories are vehemently stirred up, taking a decisive step forward in answering the question of today's condition humaine.

Bool starts her examination with the Major-Arcana-Tarot that flourished at the end of the 16th century in Italy and France. It is based on the Visconti-Sforza-Trionfi deck of cards which was produced and played in the circle of Milan ducal families. Tarot cards have a long history that in regard to esotericism ranges back to ancient times, but they are experiencing their heyday in the present. That hardly comes as a surprise, for tarot reflects internal and external processes and establishes connections that cannot be causally explained. One can reject this as Zeitgeist kitsch, yet this suspicion is countered by a cultural-historical success story and a quest for meaning in today's indeed fragmented world. But let's start our search for traces in the Italian Renaissance. What is interesting about the Visconti-Sforza deck is that it belongs to the few works privately commissioned to artists. Accordingly, the iconography is not oriented toward religious guidelines or general representation obligations; their mode of representation is almost unduly

free in view of the norms of the time. In these cards, women play a prominent role based on their status in the early Middle Ages, due to which they are held in a Gothic style in formal terms as well. The Popess, The Star, Justice, The Lovers, and The Devil stand or sit two-dimensionally against a golden background, thus forming a fetish shaped by beautiful women, fertility and also sin. On the one hand, this appears antiquated, both today and at the time, but the fundamental questions posed to fate as well as their remedies actually never change. In line with their topicality, Bool transfers the motifs to her own picture language and adds further elements to the installation, for example, the "Stripper Pole" (girl interrupted) that also suddenly appears so extremely apt. While the representation may not be up-to-date, the interpretation could hardly be any closer to our reality. The emerging "new" images turn into processes that newly distribute the interrelations in the world of seeing, speaking and thinking: be it a priestess from the Visconti-Sforza deck; a carpet modelled on one from an English pub which, however, was hand-knotted in high-quality tradition in Taskale, Anatolia; a pole of pinecones collected in Canada and Italy made in a technically perfect way by a wrought-iron craftsman in Berlin and the Luneburg Heath; or an esoteric, religious and thus also a fateful, philosophical discourse.

The formal level expands and deepens the context. Craftwork meets abstraction meets realism meets esotericism, and thus optimistic wishful thinking in view of a holistic tomorrow. But this does not take place without breaks and tilts. For example, the central perspective of the carpet's traditional pattern is interrupted and sewn together in an apparently false ways; the "Stripper Pole" is also made correctly in term of craftsmanship, yet it is disintegrated into its individual components; the painting of the tarot models meets avant-garde abstraction, thus contrasting different views of the world. Photograms, also an important medium of new, reproductive thought, as well as overpainting round off the picture. Formal qualities and materialities are decisive ideological and historical factors that often contribute more to content-related definitions than any theoretical treatise.

Bool subtly works with the cultural and social subtexts of symbols. Material and content are shifted in regard to their context, to then again approximate the complexity of today's realities. At issue are visible and invisible images. What at first appears as hermetism is gradually deciphered as an overall image capable of precisely outlining the constellation of tensions between rationality and irrationality, between utopian avant-garde and today's wishful thinking, between the demands of a society and the tasks of artistic production.

In his texts on the image, Jacques Rancière searches for the historical turning point at which the artistic image emancipated itself from the regime of representation, i.e., when it started acquiring a "self". In his view, the deliberate not-showing or not-making-similar in today's image production marks an emancipative step offering new possibilities and expanding the field of vision. And that is precisely what occurs in Shannon Bool's work. When she translates ideological references, whether the anarchical tarot cards of Italian Renaissance, the symbols of present-day subcultures and suppressed passions, or the new wave of esotericism into her own unmistakable language, the construction always remains evident. Images are socially determined and are in a constant state of change, dependent solely on intention and reception. The artist consistently seeks subtle escapes from art's traditional and figurative representation systems in order to create new possibilities of defining our surroundings. Between analytical reflection and emotional fascination, her works reveal the option of yet unknown image spaces. That remains mysterious but not undecipherable. The tarot cards as well as Shannon Bool's installation offer interpretive tools that have a lot to do with our fantasies and are therefore all the more important. It is not about a defined space but a space of potentials that, to stick to the definition of *arcanum*, can also mean remedy. Yet the theatre of life also is also unrestrictedly open to a negative result. However, that's life....

Shannon Bool (1972* Canada) has studied at Städelschule, Frankfurt, Germany. She lives and works in Berlin. 2008/09 she has been Visiting Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe.

Current and up-coming exhibitions:

Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany, "7 x 14",

16. 6. – 28. 6. 2009 (with Alex Mueller);

Neuer Kunstverein Aschaffenburg "Was sonst soll ich lieben, wenn nicht das Rätsel?", 26. 7. – 13. 9. 2009 (G);

CAPC – Museum of Contemporary Art Bordeaux (G) curated by Alexis Vaillant, 12. 2. – 14. 6. 2009;

Gallery Tracy Williams, New York, US, "Tactical Support" (G) curated by Anthony Hubermann, 14. 5. – 30. 6. 2009;

Solo exhibition

GAK – Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany, 2010

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