

Helen Feifel
22.9. – 9.11.2012

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In Helen Feifel's multi-faceted work, attributions to either object or painting are dissolved: Painterly interventions supplement her drawings, objects and photographs, rendering a genre-specific separation impossible.

The hand-coloured photographs form the core of her show. They stand for numerous techniques which she applies in a sophisticated, creative process: The artist partially paints used cardboard boxes and combines them to form costume-like constructions. Worn by persons, they attain a performative character and are then captured in photos. The painterly intervention takes place in the subsequent colouring of the black-and-white pictures. The artist hereby refers to a forgotten art form – the hand-colouring of photos – which she carries out in a meticulously way using special albumen glazing colours. She leaves the body untreated, thus visually setting off the coloured elements. The result is a multi-layered material aesthetic: The cardboard boxes cloaking the bodies are reminiscent of pieces of clothing, so that the photographs appear as depictions of a futuristic fashion show or a stage play. They simultaneously define camouflage objects, behind which the individuals seem to dissolve into abstract shapes. A special effect is evoked by the dimensions of the photographs, which are nearly life-size and therefore create a relationship between the viewer and the human sculpture.

A further form of reshaping found objects is embodied by her ceramic objects which are assembled from fragments of the most various cultural circles, generation and tastes. Merely the visible interior space reveals their origin: One recognizes the bottom of a vase as well as lime traces from the water. The objects tell a story in a subtle way, and the viewer imagines the living spaces of their former owners. The vases which were shattered and reconstructed by the artist form a collage of past worlds placed in a new context. Sources of inspiration are masks of the most various ethnicities, including hand-carved African wooden masks and Shrove Tuesday masks from the Swabian-Alemannic region. Similar to the coloured photographs, the aspect of camouflage and costumes is taken up here and continued on a three-dimensional level.

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The exhibition space is additionally redefined by an expansive work. A patterned curtain, which at first sight appears quite ordinary, serves to extend the wall and completely seal off the room except for a narrow passageway. But it is also an object-like canvas, the painted pattern of which forms a self-contained whole only when viewed from a certain vantage point. The spaces between the gathered parts were deliberately omitted, so that the painting would disintegrate into fragments if the curtain were drawn. Helen Feifel's architectural intervention thus breaks with its traditional function as an interior accessory and plays with our perception.

In her work, Helen Feifel succeeds in conceptually linking fashion, painting, sculpture, and culture, without, however, charging the aesthetics of the individual pieces with pretentious interpretations.

- Anna Schanowski

Biographical note

Helen Feifel (*1983) lives and works in Karlsruhe. She completed her studies as a master student at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in 2011. She has participated in exhibitions at, among others, the Regionale in Kunsthalle Basel, the Städtischen Galerie Karlsruhe and Terminal P in Zurich. In 2011 she was awarded a grant from the federal state of Baden-Württemberg.

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung
Humours
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It suggests itself to describe Molly Zuckerman-Hartung's works as abstract paintings, yet this doesn't quite hit the nail on the head. One can obviously relate her pieces to the formal variants of American abstraction as represented by Mary Heilmann, Helen Frankenthaler, Agnes Martin, or also Jackson Pollock. Her material assemblages composed of oil, acrylic and spray paint, canvas, cut-up canvas, pasted shreds of canvas, and found objects or prints, are structurally akin to the New Realism of a Robert Rauschenberg, the poetic recycling of reality, but they also critically question reality. This is accompanied by a reflection on social understandings of value, the combination of high and low culture in art. As with a perpetual motion machine, opposites such as beautiful/ugly, feminine/masculine, analytical/emotional, concentrated/proliferating, and sculpture/painting in Molly Zuckerman-Hartung's works trigger the reflection on the theoretical subtext of painting. The viewer fragmentarily "reads" "texts" about punk, sex, critical and political theory, and, of course, autobiographical subjectivity in her works. Dealing with theoretical, philosophical and gender-specific views of social and artistic forms is the subtext of the artist, who in the process of production also questions her own role. Hidden behind the individual letters of the alphabet on her website, one finds her own essays, statements or quotes in dialogue with theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, Susan Sonntag or Claude Levi-Strauss, song lyrics, poems, links to befriended artists, or a list of "Painters we should know". This infinite process of a conceptual analysis of the question of context and its hegemonic power to define a painting is in line with Zuckerman-Hartung's work process. The production of a painting can take several years, its completion remains an "endeavour" that from the artist's perspective is a hazardous one, as is the case with her new pieces, "Monster Energy" or "Prairie Winds" (both 2010-2012). The works are doubtless abstract, the canvases are cut up, joined together, nailed, paint was applied in numerous layers, removed again, and found objects were attached. In this manner, Molly Zuckerman-Hartung's works of art construct a critical narrative field on the status of painting and simultaneously depict the perception of reality in our society, in the here and now.

Biographical Notice

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung is a painter living in Chicago. She has shown extensively in Chicago and New York City, including a solo show The Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago). Recently, she was in a two person show with David Keating, called Hysterical Sublime, at Spazio Cabinet (Milan) and has presented her solo exhibition at the gallery Corbett Vs Dempsey in Chicago. She has taught introductory and advanced painting at SAIC and Northwestern University, as well as a graduate seminar at SAIC with Dana DeGiulio, is one director of five at Julius Caesar (Chicago project space, 50 shows and running) with Dana DeGiulio, Chris Naka, Min Song, and Sean Ward, and she has writing in Possible Projects. She spoke on a panel at CAA organized by Michelle Grabner on Painting Positions in 2010, and has been a visiting artist at UIC, Washington University in St Louis, and Harold Washington College.