

PRECESSION OF THE SENSES

All creative image making is in a state of metaphorical precession, which is so to say it is always being oriented or directing itself towards something that exists ahead or in front of it. It is always expanding the parameters of the seen even if it sometimes draws upon former processes or historical conventions and references to do so.

The question today – in our increasingly media saturated age – is how artists are able to continually remake the present anew again and again; that is to say beyond the most obvious distinction of their shifting temporalities?

With the artists in this exhibition it can be said that a single particular affinity prevails, namely that the artist image-makers all share the same gallery of Contemporary Fine Arts in Berlin. In that sense it is a double-exhibition in purely critical terms, for not only does it address the creative sensibilities of the participating artists, but also reveals something of the aesthetic tendencies and strategies expressed by the gallery commonly known to Berliners as CFA.

In this context not only must there be the sense of an internal coherence within the creative expressions of each artist-participant, but also a shared aesthetic tendency that encapsulates the wider exhibition policy of the Berlin gallery which they all share. And, the work expression is a clue in itself, since much of the work exhibited by CFA revolves around systems and theories of expression and creative performance. This is to say in general that it is less conceptually based and more perceptually grounded. It naturally follows that many of its artists are painters who extend the pictorial role of perception rather than that of immediate conceptual abstraction. The distinction is the desire to create an affect rather than just an intellectual effect.

An artist like Anselm Reyle vindicates the case in point, since his work is highly expressive and carries forward different ideas of spatial perception and material inquiry. He pursues the vitality and inherent diversity of materials recharging old forms of process and appropriation transforming them into contradictory uses and presentation.

Conversely, the Transylvania-born brothers Gert & Uwe Tobias often work from a more archaic pictorial background. They produce large woodcut images, collages and ceramics where esoteric references are made to alchemical, folkloric and traditional Romanian art forms like glass painting. As twins their works unearth largely forgotten but original and shared aspects of ethnic regional Romanian painting and images, pictorial contents which are thereafter updated into their own unique and highly personal vocabulary. Several references to the Transylvanian Vlad the Impaler (the Dracula model for Bram Stoker's character) are evoked but ironically parodied.

The sense of a deeply personal but intense visual vocabulary is also very much in evidence in Tal R whose works cannot easily be confined to any given trope of subject matter. Born in Israel and living in Copenhagen, Tal R fuses together a myriad of different sources both in painting, sculpture, printmaking and mixed media. He uses flattened but intensely bright colours in his works that are sometimes reminiscent of child art, yet somehow extended since there is a soft and strong and perverse sense of humour in his paintings. To speak of him simply as his painting is also to ignore Tal R's intimate relationship. An intimate relationship with drawing, and what he calls the 'dressed up sub-conscious ideas' often derived from early life memories and experiences.

And, drawing is crucial to the characterisation of Marc Brandenburg, whose works summon up vox populi in terms of their subject matter. Brandenburg is deeply interested in issues of ethnic identity and gender, and artificially constructed celebrity related to popular culture. Whether looking at racial stereotyping, football fans, or reinterpreting iconic images, his black and white drawings are unique translations most often from pre-existent colour photographs. However, they are not simple copies but rather visual translations forming a new chain of signification and in consequence a new meaning. To speak of the iconic evokes the paintings of German artist Michael Kunze whose images work with various architectonic structures and assemblages. The structures he shows in his works are often unstable and fanciful, that is to say from their chosen viewpoint and pictorial arrangement they appear to be fictional structures of the mind. The pseudo-fictional approach accompanied by delicately painted passages creates a subtle optical tension between the subject matter and the process of painting through which it is realised. The last thing you could call the 'in your face' socio-political paintings and photographic collages of Jonathan Meese is subtle expression. Meese as performance artist, activist intervention artist, collaborator with other artists, and an innovative and expressive image maker (through painting sculpture and a variety of mixed media) challenges any and all contemporary art's static conventions. Theatrical, provocative, at times almost comic and/or burlesque Meese allows for no easy categorisation. He is quite literally a one-off identity whose language of mark-making and appropriative collage intervention cannot easily be defined. If expression and identity form of polarities of Meese, issues of identity and gender are central to the work of Sarah Lucas. The British born artist Lucas is a founding figure of the YBA generation which emerged in the London art scene of the late 1980s and early 90s. Working through sculpture, installation and photography, she addresses female identity and her own personal life formation. Less feminist and more artist-activist Lucas works intentionally provoke the viewer into a state of self-analysis. She actively deconstructs deeply embedded male archetypes of female identity, and in the current exhibitions presents a series of photographs in a work that intentionally vindicates this point.

Given the breadth and number of artists represented by CFA an absolute unity of purpose is never possible, but what is quite clear that expressive and challenging positions are much in evidence. In the wider context the artists in this exhibition present no more than a glimpse of what is leading platform of art in Berlin. This said these artists shown certainly set a tone that is identifiably that of CFA, and opens out wider issues as regards many other artists that are represented by this highly successful Berlin gallery.

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