

GALERIE EMANUEL LAYR
SEILERSTÄTTE 2
1010 WIEN

+43 1 945 17 91
GALLERY@EMANUELLAYR.COM
WWW.EMANUELLAYR.COM

Benjamin Hirte
Jaws
08.06. - 26.08.2017

The German title of Spielberg's movie 'Jaws' was less poetic than its English original. It was simply called 'Der weiße Hai' (The white shark). 'Jaws' as show title felt tempting, besides its cultural reference to a great shocker, for the literal reduction of an animal to its big mouth.

Two more reasons: Jaws are a part of the human speaking apparatus and there are some 'great whites' in this show. The whites consist of 2mm PVC Plates, partly printed or painted on, vacuum formed and mounted on aluminium frames. The final size is defined by the dimensions of the vacuum forming machine. The molds shaping the PVC relief are drawn in Illustrator and watercut from cheap wood plates. Then they are attached to a base-plate matching the size of the machine's heating panel. I added 'aftereffects' to some of them using clay or a jigsaw. Finally the PVC - plates are placed on these templates, heated and through sucking out the air the softened plastic is pulled into relief.

The narrative of the show is not linear, analogous to a big part of my daily routine of consuming and hoarding information while jumping back and forth between images and text. The motifs on the wall pieces follow a kind of 'shuffle mode', as a friend called it. This term might be critique, indifference or appreciation, but the idea of the 'shuffle mode' fosters this ambiguity anyways. The pieces hence assemble material and symbols from a private artistic folklore, same as visual material and stuff that I always wanted to use in my work, but was struggling to do so as a sculptor.

It is not the first time I use ligatures - a combination of two or more letters into a single symbol - a joint. Many pieces in this show can be understood as ligatures.

In one of the reliefs you see a slightly frustrated, dumb, cartoonish face. The eyes are composed of the lower g from the google logo intersected with the loops of the section sign (§ - in many European countries a symbol for law and justice and generally used to denote sections within a document). Its mouth is made up of a horizontal row of teeth as if from a protruding lower jaw, actually adapted from one of my ink drawings. The feeling is that of a nickelodeon character who just got hit on the head and now tries to remember what things are really like and to retrieve its memory.

A golem, between figure and clump (content- and formwise). I have a sculptural fascination for dumbness, the grotesque and a certain cartoon matter as is present in things simplified, abstracted, unfinished or raw in appearance.

In many of my recent works I use letters from a font I designed. The typeface follows a very simple logic: rectangles are given variations through pinched out circle segments. Despite its geometrical simplicity, people keep comparing it to cheese, razor blades, bones. In 'Jaws' they are used in layers to create the relief contours for the PVC plates.

A color photograph of a woman or man - you can't really tell - , struggling with a buggy through a snow storm at night, is printed on the bottom of another piece. The trodding figure's silhouette blending with the buggy appears like a new entity, a chimera of sorts - visual counterpart to the ligature. The relief in

GALERIE EMANUEL LAYR
SEILERSTÄTTE 2
1010 WIEN

+43 1 945 17 91
GALLERY@EMANUELLAYR.COM
WWW.EMANUELLAYR.COM

this piece is comprised of six rows of each four pairs of small eyes. They are studies from one of Tim Burton's early ghost characters, basically lining up scary and angry eye positions. Protruding through the plastic they resemble organic, insect like matter pushing through skin.

Ironically this show does not only negotiate my ongoing personal albeit contemporary sculptural struggle to employ images, textual information and found footage from daily media through and on objects.

It also takes a step back from the object in space in the form of the relief. It pulls the figurative back into my work by taking the body, that I was missing so dearly, as symbolic topic. Body parts - a shuffled body. Tooth, heart, bones, confused eyes, angry eyes, gazing eyes.

There are only two sculptures in the show in a classical sense:

A pokemon like sitting cushion, representing a 'backbone', a crucial component of the spine, with an egg yolk coloured spinal disc on top as seating.

(I have used this combination of materials - felt and leather - before in a series referring to US college jackets also known as 'Letterman Jackets'. Their athletic symbols resurface here also in the wallpiece 'Pecker'.)

'Bones' to me are a structural relative to the letter, particularly when comparing the spine (holding up and structuring the human body) with the alphabet (constituting language and text).

The other object is a stone slab, titled 'Jaw', its partly carved round shape yet again vaguely resembling a tooth or a bone.

Stone as material is very heavy, expensive and hard to handle. My father is a stone sculptor, my brother now, too. I was trained in stonemasonry before going to art school. I grew up with stone, always vagabond between arts and crafts, tombstones, memorials, fountains in public space and in the end sculptures too, if that makes a difference.

I left it open whether the sketchy stone piece is finished or not. Basically it is a reminder, like a post-it for the next day, to remind me of future themes and issues still to solve, one of them: dealing with stone again.

For now the PVC eases me, allowing for figurative matters, sculpturally handling some of the clichés and heroisms about art and object, that I grew up with. This white fetish-like skin over actual forms connects it with a product based idea. Plastics.

The show's clock is a re-edit of an older piece and appears even more topical these days. Logo and title refer to a particular issue from 1967 of the satirical magazine 'The Realist'. 'The Realist Magazine' was an x-rated spin-off of the popular American 'MAD Magazine'. It had its heyday in the 60s and 70s. 'The post JFK Issue' treated themes relating to psychadelic drugs - the altered font hints to the bent perception of a political reality after the assassination of the US President.

The Magazine is said to be the first satirical magazine to deliberately launch conspiracy theories.

To the left of the clock hangs a flatscreen showing a looped video. The video comes with a morbid tone in its subtitles to a spinning coin animation. The coin features human hair on one and a hanging foot on the other side. The idea of a flattened body from head to toe. The subtitles are made of text fragments, partly my own writing plus lines from an illustrative text at the anthropological museum in Naples and the opening monologue from Pasolini's 'Medea'. The last part is taken from a news report headline: *Great white sharks are being killed in bizarre fashion off the coast of [South Africa](#) as carcasses have been found washed up with only their livers missing. Killer whales are believed to be responsible for the strange predatory pattern, with one expert noting that the organs were removed*

GALERIE EMANUEL LAYR
SEILERSTÄTTE 2
1010 WIEN

+43 1 945 17 91
GALLERY@EMANUELLAYR.COM
WWW.EMANUELLAYR.COM

with 'surgical precision'.

Two steps connect the floor levels of the gallery. I installed a boxed metal drain over the full length of the stair, creating an edge (a dash if you will) making it harder to cross from one level to the other. The drain is empty except for the dust and dirt it collects over the course of the exhibition and some small useless things from my wallet and other people's pockets. Pools, basins, pipes and drains have been a crucial field of interest in my work over the past years. As places to store, contain, connect, sort, process and get rid of stuff, they always also reference a symbolic infrastructural outside.

Ultimately, 'jaws' are the part of a body that speaks and devours.
Within a cartoon logic it is body parts that are left over by the splatter and feast of the predator.