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Michaela Meise

The Sick Book
10.1 - 10.2.2014
Press Release

If there is a common ground to the exhibited objects - a book, furniture, ceramics - it would be the notion of the grotesque. The expression of laughter in the history of art (i.e. François Rude's *Young Neapolitan Fisherboy Playing with a Tortoise*) has connections with *Grotesque Realism* as it is described in Mikhail Bakhtin's literary study *Rabelais and his World*. Carnavalesque transgressive rituals and anarchic humour are residues of subcultural, pre-Christian traditions, which is why laughing and smiling were banned in the art of medieval Christian Europe. A grin displays teeth, showing the only visible part of the skull of a living human. Laughter reveals the grin of death. During a short time it was praised, however: some 13th century grinning sculptures (i.e. in the cathedrals of Magdeburg and Naumburg) prove that smiling was then considered as an expression of the joyful presence of the Holy Spirit. One example is the portrait of Reglindis which is part of my relief *Sookeesous Reglindis*. In the 19th century sculpture *Young Neapolitan Fisherboy playing with a Tortoise* there is no more reference to christianity or pre-existing cults. But the fisherboy is wearing a woolen cap, which is the bonnet rouge of the French Revolution (sculptor François Rude was an anti-royaliste).

The exhibited seats *Cheshire Cat* and the *Cheshire Kittens* have the shape of a weightless and floating smile. It is a *grin without a cat* (Lewis Carol) and is inspired by a character in Carol's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The character of the Cheshire Cat actually has some historical heritage in old church decorations in the English county of Cheshire.

The Sick Book was developed from picture materials from the internet, representing spa facilities in Germany, where they are named *Wellness*. Mixed with private photo material, book covers and a collection of newspaper adverts the book illustrates the contemporary aesthetics of physical and mental wellbeing. The lines between a spa and a rehab center are blurred. They address what sociologist Alain Ehrenberg named the typical mental diseases of contemporary capitalist society: depression and addiction. They are both connected with either too much or too little consumption, since consumerism is the ground on which the economy is based.

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Michaela Meise (b. 1976) lives and works in Berlin. From 2010 to 2012 she held a guest professorship in sculpture at the Universität der Künste, Berlin. In 2012 Meise stayed four months in Addis Ababa with the Hessian travel grant. Her most recent solo exhibitions were at Standard, Oslo (2013), Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles (2013), in Grazer Kunstverein (2011) and Badischer Kunstverein (2009). Her works have also been on display in numerous group exhibitions, such as in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin (2013); Marres Maastricht Centre for Contemporary Culture, Netherlands (2012) and Kölner Kunstverein (2012). In addition, Michaela Meise has given several concerts, e.g. in the Münchner Kammermusik (2013) and in Berlin, Brussels, Maastricht, Cologne and Hamburg. In 2014 she receives the Falkenrot prize of Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, which will be followed by a solo show and catalogue.