

BQ

Mara Wohlnhaas
“Rekommandeur”

Exhibition: 31.08. - 30.10.2021

Mara Wohlnhaas' artistic practice can be visualised as a pendulum which swings between two poles: the artist's biography and manifestations of the material. This image seems especially fitting because it lends a temporal and spatial frame to the different aspects of her work which cannot be taken in simultaneously. Since the pendulum never stops for long enough to give a necessarily more durational moment of insight, we are instead left with a focus on the vast in-between space which characterizes her art.

The artist is gifted with the special skill of keeping insights into her biography, on the one hand, and into her artistic language, on the other hand, brief but effective. She attaches a sense of particularity and intensity, which one would not want to miss, to every impression, even if just for a brief second.

Spectators find themselves in the position of a possible confidant around a shared secret which never becomes tangible but rather serves as an alluring key to what may follow. Similarly, the sculptures which Wohlnhaas has installed in the space can be weighed in the hand just like keys. Even though this happens without touching them, physical closeness to the sculptures is generated via looking and implies possible functional uses of these objects. The branches, claws, fins, helmets etc. do not just seem to want to enmesh humans, they contain a vital human element in themselves.

For BQ, Mara Wohlnhaas has developed a spatial installation. Its individual components form a network of tense relations. The set contains a cubicle which, due to limited space, is reserved for the artist alone, a crane which rests on pointed limbs, as well as cylindrical deep freezers. A spoken word track, mixed with different audio layers, activates the installation, and transports it out of its stand-by mode. The spoken word format returns upon inspection of the deep freeze cylinders as frozen pages with text which are being conserved here.

The scene is framed by posters depicting a collaged self-portrait of the artist – she assembles close-up images of her body in costume, turning them into ikons of deformed avatars. These images literally stand for Wohlnhaas' art: she dissects her thoughts and impressions alongside her chosen material and sends them on different routes, until they come together once again.

The origin of the figurative constellation is based on a funfair ride. The funfair narrative is made explicit and places the artist in the role of the barker, an office for which she uses the cubicle. She highlights the comforting familiarity of the fair including the peaceful Sundays and makes the aesthetic nuances of the funfair's audio-visual network available. Once the worn-out material has been shed, she reinscribes her world with the newly gained vocabulary.

The moment in which the ride sets in motion is suspended, for now. Wohlnhaas makes her announcements, present, yet with her back to the audience. She addresses a crane, encased in protective chequer plate with chains for buckling up attached to it, which has frozen in aggressive preparedness. While the barker would normally look out and comment on the movements of the guests, Wohlnhaas uses the art of barking to insert a phantasy world into the exhibition space. The forces which spin bodies and organs around during the ride are powerless here. Nevertheless, people are being moved, and at this point let me return to the image of the pendulum. The switch between that which serves as a basis for the artist's words and the presence and materiality of the sharp edges which the steel backdrop provides, has to be understood by visitors quickly and flowingly. Wohlnhaas offers many things to spectators, but not for long. This way, we are still being shaken, searching for stability whilst falling under the spell of the barker.

Mara Wohlnhaas, born 1997 in Karlsruhe, studies at the Kunsthakademie Düsseldorf in the class of Rita McBride. This year, she was selected as a stipend holder of the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes.

Jan-Luka Schmitz, 2021

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