

GALERIE FONS WELTERS

Autofiction

Gina Fischli, Clémence Lollia Hilaire, Kinke Kooi, Perri MacKenzie, Win McCarthy, Phung-Tien Phan, Josiane M.H. Pozi, Evelyn Taocheng Wang, Trevor Shimizu, Lily van der Stokker and Bruno Zhu. Curated by Melanie Bühler.

3 September – 8 October 2022

It is Impossible not to Be Dealing with Clichés When Drawing Flowers - Ree Morton

A work of art doesn't come out of nowhere. It is born out of life, a specific reality, which is to say: the materialization of an art practice has to do with rent, studio space, money, family, time, education, mental health, etc., etc. AUTOFICTION focuses on how all of this informs an artwork. It brings together artworks that draw from the personal and autobiographical. Sometimes the results are funny and weird; at other times, they're tentative and open-ended. Standards and conventions are invoked to provide contrast (Bruno Zhu, Kinke Kooi), and the personal is measured against art historical grandeur (Gina Fischli) and literary and painterly conventions (Trevor Shimizu through the use of memoir, and Perri MacKenzie by invoking the tradition of the nude in painting). The everyday and the literal are held up against the gallery wall (Lily van der Stokker), lunch is served (Phung-Tien Phan) and strangers are met (Josiane M.H. Pozi).

The show's point of departure is the work of the American artist Ree Morton,* whose work I became infatuated with when I had just given birth, almost two years ago. It seems crazy to say, but as soon as I'd had my baby, I desperately wanted to go back to work. I desperately wanted my ability to think clearly back and to regain the sense of control I'd managed to maintain in the last few years. But now there were hormones, exhaustion and sleep deprivation, and of course there were bottles to make, diapers to change, etc. There was too much *life* and not enough *work*. And even when I managed to carve out a moment for myself at my desk, everything was cloudy. How was I supposed to function, professionally, when so much life was spilling over into my work? At the same time, I was struggling with the fact that in so many ways I was inhabiting a giant cliché – that of the overwhelmed, overly emotional mother, unable to make it work. It was all supposed to have been so rosy, baby pink, a dream come true.

It was then that I opened the catalogue I'd picked up from the Ree Morton* retrospective at the ICA in Philadelphia in 2019. I was drawn to Morton's work because it uses a language that refers to her personal life – that of a divorced mother of three – in complex and sometimes also dark ways. Motherhood, with Ree Morton, seems unresolved, ambiguous, heavy *and* fun. Phrases such as "Terminal Clusters", "Fading Flowers", and "Antidotes for Madness" are paired with various objects made of celastic – a type of

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pliable plastic used in set design. These objects – bows, aprons and ribbons – are painted in bright colors and are often held together by arcs dotted with light bulbs or structures that resemble the fronts of puppet theaters, which give the set-up a festive, circus-like feel, albeit with a slightly unhinged undertone.

The ambiguity I found in these works was appealing to me. It spoke to the intense feelings I was having at the time, both positive and negative. Morton's works evoke the clichés of motherhood but make them stranger, weirder and more complex. The works in this exhibition, in similar ways, allude to the loaded topic of authorship, the figure behind a work. They do so, however, in incomplete ways; they resist defining this "I" conclusively, and at a time when art institutions are fixated on artists' biographies, this seems important.

*The American artist Ree Morton has an unusual biography: after giving birth to three children and living the itinerant, suburban life of a navy officer's wife, Morton decided in the late 60s to become an artist (she was born in 1936). She got her BFA and MFA, divorced her husband and moved into a loft in New York, where she made unusual work beyond the artistic trenches of the time. Tragically, her life (and career) was very short: in 1977, aged 40, Morton died in a car accident.

Melanie Bühler