

KIRCHGASSE Chantal Kaufmann
off they go
30.9. – 11.11.2023

In her first solo exhibition at Galerie Kirchgasse, *off they go*, Chantal Kaufmann allows four groups of works to collide.

The screen print, with its resemblance to fabric swatches, comprised of color-filtered and painterly edited photos, unexpectedly emerges as a form of transmedia art under the title *Crimson Joy*. Reminiscent of connections between art, film, and poetry, they allude to the poem *The Sick Rose* (1789) by William Blake, which Derek Jarman references in his experimental film *Imagining October* (1984). The poem portrays a worm that, in its affection for and entwining within a crimson rose brings about its destruction. Divided into repetitive individual frames, *Crimson Joy* oscillates between cinematic and textual montage, allowing for reading both from left to right and from top to bottom. The tenet of “work as text” does not prompt interpretation of the individual image sequences for discernible meanings, but rather encourages an appreciation of the inherent rhythm of colors, lines, and shapes. The motif of repetition appears as the negation of unique and unequivocal significance – an aspect that evokes Julia Kristeva’s 1974 study, *The Revolution in Poetic Language*. In it, the theorist interprets historical avant-garde poetry as an example that corresponds with the feminine as the pre-linguistic semiotic, which permeates and deconstructs the syntactic and rationalistic symbolic associated with the masculine. Consequently, one could read Kaufmann’s appropriation of the ‘sick rose’ as a metaphor for a semiotic (infra)structure of language, whose critical potential unfolds in the poetic (self)destruction of meaning – a destruction that opens up space for independent interpretations by the recipients.

A similar approach is also discernible in Kaufmann’s photograms titled *Big A little a*. The three-dimensional and tactile quality of the letters, exposed directly onto photographic paper, once again hints at a mode of reception akin to textual interpretation. The artist’s treatment of the technical process as the focal point of her collages generates an obscure, organic, and physically textured surface look characterized by rhythmic interplays of light and shadow. Since the letters emerge as distinct and interchangeable little objects, we perceive them as elements of a semiotic alphabet from which further, as yet unrealized images can be imagined. Tellingly, “Big A little a” is a song title by the former English anarchist band Crass (1977–84) – a title that also evokes the “objet petit a” coined by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose linguistic analytical work was influential for theorists like Kristeva, yet was criticized by them due to its inability to conceptualize of the feminine (“La femme n’existe pas”). Given this context, the central concept of emancipatory reception in Kaufmann’s series harbors the thorn of negation of the symbolic, which emerges in Blake’s “sick rose” as well as in the photogrammatic texture.

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