

We are pleased to present new work by the American artist Jamie Isenstein at her second solo show in our Karlsruhe gallery space. Jamie Isenstein uses the media installation, performance, sculpture and drawing, often conjoining them through the mere inclusion of her body or the execution of an action. The artist formulates a surreal condition in her work, which she either documents in its moment of emergence, or personally enacts. The aspect of irritation, of undermining functionality, but also the material interlacing of textural sensuality cause her work to take on a poetic and sometimes comical shape. This is always to be seen in the context of human action, which Jamie Isenstein abstracts and often transfuses from her performances into objects and spatial situations.

Her current exhibition in our gallery is divided into a sequence of four parts: While the front room, which faces the street, features the stage set installation “Empire of Fire”, the subsequent rooms reflect the context of an imaginary theatre, through which the viewer passes – alluding to audience, backstage (dressing room) and performers.

The installation “Empire of Fire”, first on view at the Liverpool Biennial 2010, comprises an accumulation of Second Empire objects and furniture, each with its own steadily burning flame. The ensemble – including a Savonarola chair, a bronze chimera, logs – alludes to Jean-Paul Sartre's drama “No Exit”; the objects correspond to the props described in the piece's set. Whereas the plot of Sartre's piece symbolically describes hell through the reciprocal behaviour of three people, in Jamie Isenstein's installation the element fire synonymously plays out within the setting as a concentrate of this narration. The fusion of objects, which is suggestive of an interior contracted into a pyre, is juxtaposed with a fire hose hanging on the wall: A human hand protrudes from the hose nozzle, reducing the function of the hose – as well as any other possible action – to absurdity.

Various optical devices such as 3D glasses, opera glasses or a monocle form the point of departure for Jamie Isenstein's installation in the second room, which focuses on viewing in itself. The artist formed ceramic versions of various types of glasses, each with a flower – as an equivalent to an eyeball – set in the frames instead of glass. In the course of the exhibition the buds open into full bloom, their shape and motion processes analogizing the eye of the viewer, but also formulating transience in their dependence on water supply.

The instant of illusion is the subject of “Inside Outside Backstage Vase”: Based on a painting by the symbolist Odilon Redon, Jamie Isenstein sculpted a ceramic vase, which is exhibited containing a bouquet of both artificial and real flowers. What at first is presented as a kind of optical illusion ends up as the divulgement of a calculated illusionary situation (through the natural flowers' impermanence), from which the artificial flowers emerge as a variation of a sculptural vanitas still

life, transferring the narrative qualities of painting into an object.

Jamie Isenstein will be performing “Rug Woogie IV” in the back room of our gallery, it will continue beyond the length of the exhibition and also feature in our fair stand at Art Basel. The artist is seated at a classical pedal harp, as is used in an orchestra, but rather than plucking the strings to draw sound from them, Jamie Isenstein weaves wool through them, covering their sound. In the course of the performance, which features an “intermission” sign when interrupted, a rug develops that is connected to the instrument's strings, woven into the harp by the artist. The performance of the artist causes both harp and wool become an object tracing this very action. The title of the piece refers to an American term from the 1920s (“cut a rug”), which was used as a synonym for dancing enthusiastically within the context of the music and dance style Boogie Woogie. In “Rug Woogie IV” Jamie Isenstein undermines the functionality of the harp as well as that of the rug, yet figuratively and concretely conjoins the contrary in a poetically abstract shape.

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