

Richard Telles presents new monochromic wall sculptures by Michaela Meise, her second solo exhibition with the gallery. Known for her sculptures, appropriated imagery, and videos, whose sources glean from art history, design, film, and pop-culture, Meise marks a shift by solely employing ceramics: while these works are indebted to her ongoing fascination with 18th and 19th century sculpture and archeological history, she has pared away her post-minimalist forms and quasi-academic presentations, retaining only the monochromatic skin of the former. What remains are modestly scaled monochrome portraits with abstract elements, distilled syntheses of her diverse interests.

The sculptures depict concave faces surrounded by what initially appear to be convex abstract forms. No detail is to be found except for the gender and age of the expressionless portraits. Before working on each one, Meise simply decided if the face was to be male, female, or child—basic units of conventional representation (which often overlooks the in between)—using only her imagination to mold them. By making the faces concave, Meise precluded herself from conveying any naturalistic features, veering them into the grotesque or vaguely humanoid. Meise's attraction to the corporeality of clay is partially influenced by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (d.1875) and Jean-Antoine Houdon (d.1828), both subjects of previous works, who often sketched with the soft-earthen material, later refining them in marble. These artists inspired Meise, paradoxically, by their abilities to capture diverse degrees of human expression, but it was the inherent immediacy of clay that was key—and when fired, remains quite durable; archeological finds of ceramics attest to this. Meise takes further cues from Japanese ceramics as well, whose heterogeneous glazes crack, rupture, and crystallize under fire, reinforcing the affect of aged, primitive artifacts.

Bearing in mind the titles, “Money Faces”, another dimension is revealed: the abstract, convex forms that surround the faces become representations of currency, recalling Monika Baer's series of paintings of sliced sausages doubling as coins. Yet Meise's currency insists itself as a floating cipher due to its blankness—and while in the space of portraiture, upholds the blankness of both. The common signifiers of bodies and currency, as well as their mode of circulation, are then brought into question, which raises a larger issue within the realm of biopolitics where a person's character or biography is a currency itself within culture. Yet the faces here are expressionless, suggesting that those with no decipherable character inherently have a value too. However, when everything is rendered without distinctness, such notions of value become meaningless. Akin to past work, Meise thus blurs bodies and products, assigned values and inherent ones.

We are asked to project upon these works, armed with what we know, disarmed by what we don't, as if they were artifacts culled from an archeological trench. We are imbued with a forward-lurching

motion into a void, as opposed to being repelled by the imperviousness of minimalism. Even the monochrome vestiges of it in these new works have cracks and faults. Meise has always corroded the minimalist veneer by revealing the organic variances underneath. Her past applications of watercolor to wood is a case in point, where the grain is heightened rather than suppressed. The wall sculptures remain within this tenor while being remarkably direct, neither relying on timely abstract languages, or the photographic. Meise has located a new water vein in between, fitting for a body of work that already totters between a multitude of points.

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