

Michiel Ceulers  
Belgo-Swiss Sensibilities (für ALP)

28.09 – 27.10.2024



Walter Swennen  
MMX (apple & banana), 2010  
Found drawer, glass sheet, model plastic two-piece suite,  
one apple, one banana  
Approx. 75 × 60 × 30 cm



Jean-Frédéric Schnyder  
Geschenk, 2013  
MDF, Spiegelglas, Metall, Textil, Kleenex  
33,5 × 52 × 34 cm

Two miniature living rooms face each other.

The first is a piece by the Belgian painter Walter Swennen, which gathers an apple and a banana lazily slumped in armchairs, in an ambience of music-loving old buddies.

The second appears as a reference, in the form of Michiel Ceulers' copy of the Kleenex-dispensing sofa created by Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. His original piece plunges anyone who grew up in Switzerland into a recognizable cultural atmosphere. This handiwork for weeping parents was indeed a favorite for arts and crafts schoolteachers looking for gifts combining utility with pleasure. Ceulers' sofa seems to be simply made of agglomerated handkerchiefs: content has become container, stating that of the (role) models, we'll keep the pleasurable.

Ceulers calls in two artists from the same generation, who put into perspective attitudes that meet as much as they diverge. A casually poetic gesture on the one hand, a fastidious tinkering on the other. One uses the iconic armchairs from Uncle Scrooge's house to place his Pop banana, the other draws the lounge of the Disney Studios where, surrounded by mirrors, a bitter tear is shed on a success forever within reach.

By revisiting Schnyder's salon, Ceulers says that his work is, in general, nourished by quotes and, in particular, part of a setting where self-proclaimed amateurs come together to celebrate mainstream glories that don't really appeal to the bourgeoisie.

Therefore, three salons as models of small societies discussing, exchanging, laughing, and contradicting each other through space and time. It's about painting, how to get into it, this surface where one can stop, these layers one can dive into if desired, and how to get out of there. About the banality of looking at an apple, of the motif that takes shape, of the associations that are created, of the infinite web of references that is knitted, of the historicity that is linked, of the worlds that are colliding (!) ... Or, of the simplicity that can lead to a decision, of the subconscious at work, and of the acceptance of every gesture, every thought, as an echo of another's, as a twig brought back to the Babylonian termite mound of cultural history.

So I look. On Michiel Ceulers' zebra sofa lies the leaflet of a Marcel Duchamp's retrospective exhibition, featuring a coat hook. A weird, spidery object that turns into a coat rack to become a *Large Vehicle* on which are

hung the attributes of the great traveler: bag and umbrella, coat, scarf, and black and white checkered hat.

This motif jumps to another frame and becomes the liquid, distressing content of preference of any anxious person wanting to refer to South German painting (but also to that of Frankfurt or Cologne, or Düsseldorf! Because, as is well known, *Nur Deutsche können malen*).

And next, the black and white checks parasitize another canvas, becoming *The motif of an Emotional Metabolism*. It's not the issue of transition from figurative to abstract that's puzzling, but rather the shape of this canvas, which is reminiscent of the one with the coat rack: the angles have slightly shifted, like the recollection of the plan of a place, which we can't remember whether we visited it or were told about it.

This might be the way motifs and references operate in Michiel Ceulers' work, like a chessboard on which micro-narratives move freely, playing the same part as quotes, without distinction of any kind. Kermit the frog meets Martin Kippenberger, who meets the Pink Panther, who meets Gertrud Stein, who meets Bacchus, who meets the Ugly Duckling, who meets Love to the sound of "*Eine Rose Blüht in Colorado*". But they all live under the reign of the Yellow Canary because, despite its fragile appearance, Yellow Canary foretells future catastrophes.

And then there are these supports that are surfaces. These screwed, glued, scotch taped supports, which can even be toilet seat covers, revealing expeditions worthy of a compulsive squirrel, and indifference to posterity (one must turn Ceulers' canvases over to start considering the perplexity of the collector trying to hang them, and an exhibition could be held by just showing the back of his paintings). Regarding the surfaces, they demonstrate a love of materiality that borders on excess: they are kneaded, if not mistreated, the motifs are dragged, washed out, dirtied, the texture is so thick that one could sink into it.

The same goes for the titles confirming that both language and languages will be used in all their possibilities to tell stories, connecting concepts and analyses, dialects and literature, wordplay and figures of speech.

So much profusion in this continuous series, where each form, each word, each character leads to the next, and if one can at times fear the burying, lightness can also be paradoxically felt.

The ease of playing, the humor of someone for whom everything is motif, everything is valid, everything is culture and who doesn't bother with obedience. Ceulers gives himself the right to his very particular perspective and does so with a gentle irreverence, which isn't there to prove anything, but just for the pleasure of it.

A political attitude, if ever there was one, that doesn't care about genres and qualifications (or quantifications) and lets itself drift to the whim of its thoughts, to the whim of its fingers, to the whim of its curiosity.

Annaïk Lou Pitteloud, Brussels, September 2024