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Sunah Choi

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Exhibition: 25.06-30.08.2014 (Part One)

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Two chapters
Part One (for Sunah)

I had to think of the refrigerator door. Here small magnets secure very everyday snippets, postcards and notes. None of it is really important and the arrangement is also due purely to the moment. Everything together is neither pretty nor ugly and doesn't show any attempt to display order; it hangs there briefly between cupboard and waste bin, which does not mean that everything is worthless. The magnets are an obviously simple way to playfully arrange these things.

At the beginning of this year I saw for the first time the works that Sunah Choi created with magnets. At first it seems to have something to do with magic when individual cobblestones adhere seemingly weightlessly to the heavy steel plate that is affixed to the wall. The question of how the artist overcame gravity seems profane in comparison to the sophistication, which distinguishes the construction and arrangement. Initially it is tantalizing to find out that these six (carefully chosen for form and color) stones, which secure three monochrome C-prints and an irritating broomstick bent to an acute angle, are affixed to the steel plate only through magnetic force and not fastened in any other way. The C-prints secured by the cobblestones are photos of monochrome areas of existing architecture or objects taken by the artist. Upon closer inspection small details, such as surface structure, dirt and scratches, reveal that not abstract color fields, but concrete places are pictured here, which thereby find their way into the work; under the cobblestones collected from the street, on steel plates, as they are often used on public sidewalks to cover underground construction sites.

Bound by the magnetic force the artist can move these elements around until the final form for the work is found. This is also expressed in the title: *Rigid Fragility*, 2014. Designed as something between a panel painting that pervades the space and a restrained sculptural relief, changeability pulses through the composition and extends the work's focus from form and material to the possibility space of the imaginary.

The play between second, third and fourth dimensions also drives another group of wall works *Untitled (Valle d'Aosta)*, 2011. Here the frames are not made of wood and hidden behind white primed canvas, but are instead made of strong, square welded steel tubes that are coated in white. Crossbars divide three of these four rectangular vertical formats into two, three or four rectangular, but asymmetric fields. Attached to grommets in the corners are garishly colorful climbing ropes that only partially follow the frame in parallel lines. Made during a stay in Aosta Valley in Italy, the artist abstracts motifs from the everyday lives of the residents and derives the forms from a photographic analysis of façade elements found there that are based on divisions and segments and evoke metaphors, which at times are reminiscent of mountain climbing: hook up, secure, fasten.

The balance between playful and strict composition shifts in a container, open at the top and mirrored inside, *Behälter* (container), 2014, out of which various materials protrude: a grate, pipes, bars, PVC film. It almost looks like a bin of waste, like you find in many workshops, but it unfolds in the room as an elaborate Ikebana arrangement made of geometric components. On the inside, however, the mirrored surfaces nearly turn it into a kaleidoscope; here the elements of the fragile ensemble condense into a complex web of geometry in countless intersections that appear to lead to infinite chaos, which mocks the clarity of the outer form.

The precarious balance between material and meaning in reference to the relationship of inner order and outer form takes on a nearly oppressive form in the last work of this exhibition, *Skulptur* (sculpture), 2014: the artist had a multifunctional printer enclosed in a black cage. For the sculpture the artist fit the bars exactly to the size of the machine, framed it and then beat it with a hammer. This resulted in fractions, rips and holes on the unsightly grey outer shell, the buttons and control panel between the bars. The cage offered the printer protection in an absurd way as well as channelled the artist's violent attack: sculpting, even though somewhat limited, as a truly subtractive process. If the plug hadn't been pulled out anyway, one could probably still be convinced that the machine was made completely unusable and that it can no longer perform any of its original functions – scanning, printing, copying. As an interface between the analogue and digital world it has served its time, instead it is locked up as if it were dangerous. Sheathed on the exterior and despite the damages, with all its futility, the machine appears like a battery charged with an energy that could erupt, as if there was a possibility of an outburst, an explosion. Or like the only now still standing motor of some unpredictable development that could be started if someone plugged it in.

The moment of potential that each arrangement described here embraces is also due to the precarious, at least temporary impression, which the artist sharpens here in relation to the human body; On the one hand, through the dimensions and proportions of the works and their components and on the other hand, through the use of factory-made materials and how these are employed in everyday life. With right angles and sharp corners these are also protagonists of a narrative about modernity, which appears to deal with formal clarity and uncompromising nature. But this exhibition by Sunah Choi doesn't completely follow the narrative; it is divided into two parts and plays with the expectations of the viewers. If the first part is a question, one would expect an answer in the second – and if the first part presents an hypothesis, how would the second part confirm it?

(To be continued.)

Andreas Schlaegel

Translated by Emily Terényi