

From 4 September to 13 November 2016, the Kestner Gesellschaft will be showing the exhibition *Große Spritztour* by the German painter Monika Baer. The focus of the exhibition will be three new series of works that share the common theme of alcohol. They will be supplemented with numerous paintings, drawings, and collages from the past two decades.

Monika Baer humorously uses various approaches to painting: figuration and abstraction, supposedly expressive gestures and sensitive details seem to compete with one another. At times the narrative potential is emphasized, and at others the material literalness of the picture; at times the canvas seems like a window on the world, and at others like an object in the world. This tension is evident within individual pictures as well as between series of works: in the large-scale alcohol series, the canvas becomes a stage along whose lower edge hyperrealistic bottles are arranged in rows like actors. In the background expressive painting forms a kind of scenery.

While the large canvases make use of realistic depiction and a light color palette, the mid-sized alcohol pictures are dominated by an iridescent black that seems like negatives of the light-colored series. Stenciled labels from alcoholic drinks float on the dark background; here and there they encounter dabs of paint applied directly from the tube in pastels, mirrors, thickly applied flecks of color, and rainbow motifs. These two series juxtapose light and dark, illusionistic and emblematic representation, pictures and text. Both are also suffused with a tension between things and symbols. In the third, small-scale alcohol-themed series, this tension is again accentuated: miniature bottles of various kinds of alcohol are depicted along the outer edges of the paintings. In this way, the painting oscillates between referential and literal systems of reference.

The exhibition shows Monika Baer's continually developing vocabulary and augments it with drawings and collages that have formed their own universe in her work. In the most recent series, however, drawing appears as a disorienting element on the canvases: drawn heads of animals and people emerge from the expressive backgrounds like hallucinations, or sit like graffiti on the canvas. As part of the world portrayed in the picture or as an external commentary, the drawings here are additional figures of the dialectic reversals that the painter encourages her audience to make.

Monika Baer studied under Alfonso Hüppi at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1985 to 1992. Her works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht (2005), the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich (2006), and Documenta 12 in Kassel (2007), among others. Major retrospectives of her work were presented most recently in the United States in 2012 at the Art Institute of Chicago and in 2014 at the Williams College Museum of Art in

Williamstown. Monika Baer lives in Berlin and teaches at the Milton Avery School of Fine Art at Bard College in New York and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt.

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