

An important characteristic that marks Alexandra Bircken's art is the entanglement of different, often divergent, mutually exclusive moments through the demonstration of their virtual simultaneousness. The sculptures instinctively deny generalizing categorizations of any kind. Material, space, form, body and biography form an organic unity of complex relations. As a consequence, one will search in vain for any conceptualising addition of distinct topics in Bircken's presentations which take the scale of installations. Rather, they mark an existential encounter between, on the one hand, subtle subject matters, compressed into abstraction and, parallel on the other side, processes of a personal, associative opening that aims towards figuration.

Furthermore, the sculptural works that were created for this exhibition present an urgent confrontation with the multiple, mostly adversarial relations of the plastic objects to their own interiority. Although the bodies are sculpturally moulded through a combination of different materials, their anthropomorphic silhouette does not seem to be their only constitutive feature. Rather, it is the inscriptions that stick to the fabrics, textures and surfaces: in Bircken's works, car- and machine parts, motorcycle outfits and pieces, metal and wood, latex and leather, weapons and taxidermy are equals to knitted or woven fabrics, wool, linen, hair, eggs or braided twigs and other natural materials. Materials, which are normally presumed to have decidedly male or female attributes. Bircken's works however do not seem to know this simplifying differentiation. At least she does not weigh these opposites up against each other but establishes those otherwise polarising elements – also by making herself a subject in this – as integrative parts within one artistic language of forms. The inherent femininity of the works does not have to be discussed further, precisely because she regards her own body as an imperative condition of her artistic agency. Rather, in its very own complexity, this femininity is presumed as factum.

Going beyond the role of materials as signifiers for cultural codes, upon close observation of the formal level, the combinations of different elements reveal constructions in the sense of protective armours and inhabitable architectures. They invoke a space in which the body finds its place. At the same time, they seem to structure the organism, to imitate and prescribe its oscillating curves and sharp edges. They seem to stabilise and support it while also limiting and confining it. Without directly enforcing this problem, what lies at the core of these works is a psychological depth of focus that can be transferred onto an internal human conflict between structure and chaos. This comes with a yearning for expansion and for overcoming inflexible grids, borders, limitations and rationalisations. Both is at hand and serves its counterpart. The alleged poles are not static per-se but do instead obscure their own definition, hereby making themselves unavailable for a conventional generalisation.

The exhibition 'Ping', a title that implies at the same time an onomatopoeic sound as well as the word pain in Cologne regional dialect, is the sixth solo show of Alexandra Bircken at BQ gallery. Bircken's works are present in notable collections such as Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Sprengel Museum, Hanover, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam and Frac Normandie Rouen, Sotteville-lès-Rouen. This year, solo exhibitions were presented at the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach as well as at Le Crédac in Ivry-sur-Seine.

Anna Czerlitzki, 2017

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