

“reading in the light of doorway arrivals”
an interview with Frances Scholz
by Mark von Schlegell
on the occasion of her exhibition at Clages

You spent the last years working on the Amboy films and performances, and then working with Aura Rosenberg on a series of films exploring Walter Benjamin. You’ve also shown sculptures and conceptual work. In this exhibition you include a film and a number of printed works on plastic foil. But the first impact is the first room of painting. Is there a hierarchy here? Is the era of “painting beside itself” receding and “painting itself” returning?

A hierarchy won’t be able to find its way into my working practice. Film, sculpture, prints on foil are all informed by my painting experience. Underlying concepts subtly but strongly create alignment. My understanding of “Painting beside itself” is (of course besides other things) a transmission, an attempt at conscious integration of the exterior without an escape. I doubt even if an art work here, or a painting most particularly, has to fulfill its own conditions, and just be “painting itself”. Often my work merges with another medium as distortion. The printed piece appears to be painted and the painted printed.

Your paintings are paradoxically immersive in the sense that despite their apparent minimalism, they contain expansive, almost infinite depths, at odds with what appears to be their rapid, even gestural origin. One sees experimental formalism as well as conceptualism in your work; but there is also a looking back at radical painting, and expressionism.

I definitely play with the idea of gesture, though the evolving forms are coming to existence out of a projected, frozen image. Intriguing to me is the simple fact of painting in general, that the articulation of the material itself, the constitution of the color by loose pigments with a binder and the forms they constitute and collaborate upon in combination with the use of tape, are conveying the content in all complexity.

The depths you’re referring to might come from how time is incorporated in these paintings. History is present itself, through visible layers of the actual painting process. We see the paint simultaneously recording itself as inseparable from the world in which it has been projected in several different presents. The paintings reflect a kind of concentrated danger of the present moment. The immediacy of composition is placed in the foreground. Any success is always fragile, and depending on the representation of what can not be perfectly unveiled. The vital and lively state

I try to produce is due to interruptions and inversions of the painting process, and by the acceptance of the unforeseen.

Could that process be seen as kind of editing?

Definitely, when you view film editing through my eyes as the willingness to change the story of assigned ideas by any placement, setting, and/or staging. Focus on the moment cuts both ways. It makes you aware of the fragments a film is constituted of; paradoxically in painting, the similar process puts a oneness or unity in the foreground.

The film Fall Again is somewhat reminiscent of your film Rollen, which seems to slow down cinema, expanding the space between narrative points. But as that film emerged from whiteness into a sort of painting, this emerges from darkness into another kind of painting. Could you say a few words about how this film came about and what sort of painting you had in mind?

During my 2016 residency at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, I found myself filming at a rodeo in Alpine, Texas. Editing the footage, it soon became clear that except for one single scene/image, the film would be a one-sided point of view on Texan/American culture from an opinionated foreigner. To avoid this more or less prejudiced and loaded POV, I concentrated on the single exceptional image of the gathered rodeo cowboys. I looked at it as if it were an old master painting. Black in the old masters is used in a similar fashion as I use white in my paintings today, significant of the void, both the beginning and end.

In that sense it seems a very European vision of American-ness.

I chose an image that seemed to fall out of its nationalism. In their secret collaboration on the image, the cowboys create their own slow motion scene, staged and theatrical. No matter that it's a captured moment, taken from the real. A cut-out from the void is neither real nor unreal. But I was also drawn to the Hat as American signifier; and chased a certain play of the signifiers having to do with Timothy Brook's *Vermeer's Hat*, a book which traces the iconography of the hat in terms of new global mercantilism of the 17th century.

With horses, the film also contains a window to the other works in the exhibition (and to older films like Starlite (2015), involving horses. Your plastic works contain an image of horse hair. Is the horse a particular signifier for you?

I'm interested in how the selected images maintain, or shake off their mutual associations. Like "cowboys and horses" or "hats and feathers." Here art is like a ritual, celebrating the dissolution of the original context, creating new ones, detached, adrift. But the horse can stand for the love of animals as well; there, the uncombed/ungekämmt horse hair is a gesture away from the human arrangement. And who knows what might come out into the open, or bleeding through what I would have preferred being buried? The work on and with foil is a record as well of something not actually present. In that case the horse stands as well for that absence. An echo or mirrored image of an unseen painting. Despite the artificiality of plastic, as art the foil reaffirms an attraction to the wild, presenting the formation and the potential of the imagery to break away from its origin. The uncombed/ungekämmt is everything outside the painting that nevertheless combs it. Uncombed, not pressed into a predetermined form or idea, might promise anarchic freedom and openness to natural process. The horse has antennas in all directions ...

Plastic also brings to mind the body bags of Tatort, a show I happen to know you have watched in the past. I wonder if it's an older idea of abstraction/figuration that this plastic is meant to put away, or render as crime scene. You have even gone so far as to "give the world abstraction back" in a catalog title. Bearing in mind the phrase is ambiguous, anyway, I ask: what are some of the ways this new series of "Zipper paintings", the blue zipper, is not abstract?

For me to use the term *abstract* practically, I use it as a nomadic, unsharp term. Maybe I could go so far as saying that abstract in the context of my painting is always standing for non-abstraction as well. Abstract signifies a coming into being of what painting is. For me this means relying in a primary sense on the articulate presence of color pigments on canvas. "Reading in the light of doorway arrivals."

The motif comes not from a photographic or direct depiction of an image of a zipper, but from a series of my pencil drawings, projected. The image is seemingly secondary; yet incidental works on paper determine my moves and decisions on the larger scale of the canvas. The spikes in the drawings made me reflect on the precarious moment of entering or relating to a work.

Not abstract is the zipper itself, and the possibilities of "things" jumping in and out of the form. For me these zipper paintings give the canvas as Pinball table, where a ball shoots through and releases various possibilities. But a zipper opens and closes us to all sorts of possibilities. It works up and down. In an erotic sense you could unzip, strip naked, unveil, let's say reveal an *uncombed* mess of hair. There is an openness, a letting go of the art I am rendering. Not to overdo such significance, but the zipper is a meeting, in one sense, of borders — which might or might not step over the

threshold/verge into or out of one another's state of mind as they combine to one fabric.

Do such politics constitute abstraction?

In a *non*-abstract way, perhaps, the tent also pops up as a concrete image in these works. Inspired by Piero della Francesca's painting *The dream of Constantine* (1464), the tent shelters the hidden, the promise, the dream and the space in between.

One might say you're working in the vein of artists like Heilmann, Krebber, or Palermo who paint with a simultaneity of minimalist and conceptual concerns. Yet in your work the conceptual, even banal root of the image seems both more present and more radically, visibly cut away. Could you comment on the role of theory and critical thinking/action in your painting?

I'm not relying on any single theoretical approach to produce or back up my paintings. Text is always a posterior/subsequent. Thoughts, ideas and concepts inform the work, and it's important to talk about those connections, but in no way do they justify or constitute the work. Where I feel myself in dialogue with artists like those you mention it is on the level of the canvas, the de-unified whole painting, the fragment of form ...

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