

Interior being without contact elements

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Computer games will soon be the new key medium, claimed a recent radio report about the computer game trade fair in Cologne. At least fine art will be free of this tiresome discussion. And it will also no longer matter how much painting is now one of the struggling main media – as sculpture has been for a long time – or whether it will hold its own in the long run as a superior auxiliary medium. In the foreword to his recently published little volume entitled *Über Malerei* (About Painting), Andre Rottmann, when discussing this fading media ranking, concedes, admittedly with some irritation, that painting does have considerable tenacity. Apart from its inherited basic competencies, assumed to be exhausted, it has nevertheless conquered atypical areas for itself in current art terminology as a display element, spatial factor or performative document. If there has to be painting, then please let it be as inconspicuous as possible. Works by Sergej Jensen, Karla Black or Wade Guyton can also be seen in this way. Katrin Plavcak's work is characterized by a large bandwidth of different pictorial qualities in two and also three-dimensional formats. But what wrongly sounds like a high data rate then does fit in with her approach to painting in the sense of a rapid and nimble attack. She uses painting, not the other way round, in a way that sometimes seems to be the case for born painters. The starting and success points are very different realities, from the strikingly ordinary to the abstrusely amusing. A certain fleeting quality corresponds soberly with many of her motifs from the media water heater. Her dry, tendentially functional brushwork consciously distances itself from traditional elements of contact and fetish elements and at the same time purges the seductive arts of photographic surface charms, thus shifting viewers closer to the core of the actual pictorial action, instead of excluding them with increasingly technoid brilliance and bombast. Here something that painting is alleged to lack develops a positive asceticism that is just as little obliged to claim boudoir magic as prototypical Bad Painting attitudes.

Some of the smaller formats exhibited here show individuals involved in global public life, sometimes explicitly (Tepco, 2011) and sometimes less clearly (Gaddafi behind an umbrella, Julian Assange of Wikileaks with his face apparently wiped out by flash). Plavcak is particularly interested in ambivalence as a characteristic mental motif for these figures, whether this is a media construct or caused by themselves. These people, somewhere between everyday politics and contemporary history, with a media half-life of days to months, are linked as protagonists with scandalously charged events. It seems that every catastrophe needs a face in order to plant it as indelibly as possible in a kind of media world memory. The death of glaciers has a long song to sing about inattention in this context. Perhaps faces were anyway created merely as the best possible identification trigger by gods or other early creative forces. These personified symbols become incunabula that have shrunk into health in their turn, and their media bugbear status is withdrawn by painterly essentialization, like the alleged realism of a living likeness. Plavcak's painterly omissions make Assange or the Tepco boss into those interior beings who, somewhere between hysterical media transformation and their own possible responsibility, sometimes mistake their own reflection for the next cover of *Der Spiegel*.

This kind of grumbling TV news painting is only one of many areas within Plavcak's productive and multi-layered oeuvre. The group picture is also one of her preferred genres. In a kind of hidden-object picture (*Gelebte Demokratie* [Lived Democracy], 2011), with a mish-mash of bodies, various brawls that actually took place in various parliaments are dealt with in a single picture. This vividly sturdy discussion form forcefully demonstrates eroding parameters within the perception of Western democracy as a whole. The group picture *Painting History Revisited* (2012) also tries to act as an art-historical corrective when paying tribute to many female artists from past centuries in a cover version of Max Ernst's famous surrealist group picture *Das Rendezvous der Freunde* (1922). The portrait painter *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun* (her

subjects include Marie Antoinette) and also Adélaïde Labille-Guiard as founder of the first Parisian school for female painters come together here with Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the few successful baroque female painters, who was also able to hold her ground as Caravaggio's equal in the most highly regarded genre of history painting. Banner-like fabric assemblages also feature in the exhibition, as a relatively new picture format. The flag and banner format already brings with it so much highly significant symbolism of its own that even the simplest abstraction rhetoric can convey considerably more meaning than could be achieved by similar compositions on a stretcher. Katrin Plavc¹ak's impressive variety of approaches with different pictorial elements shows how meaning creeps in and out within these abstract emblematics, using the widest possible variety of pictorial elements.

André Rottmann, "Einführende Überlegungen zur Beharrlichkeit der zeitgenössischen Malerei", in: Isabelle Graw, Peter Geimer; *Über Malerei*, August Verlag, 2012
„Der Spiegel“ is a German weekly news magazine as well as the term for mirror (translator's note).