

Anne Speier

Accrochage

24. 10. - 3.11. 2018

Böttcherstraße Prize, Bremen 2018:

Social and pictorial spaces of negotiation

Text: Luisa Ziaja

Like the crossbred creatures that inhabit Anne Speier's image and exhibition spaces and who usually present themselves in an insubordinate fashion, her work is a hybrid in the best sense and always ready to take a leap. It moves in loops from analogue to digital and back again, displaying the artist's desire to combine motifs and media, materials, genres and styles, as well as content and context.

This unlikely encounter of the employed resources and image elements constantly produces breaks and contradictions and, in turn, follows the principle of collage, which Speier medially and spatially expands and enlarges in large format paintings and sculptures. In doing so, she engages social techniques that are constituent for our social reality, and image techniques that are constituent for her work, in a dynamic exchange relationship.

Between 2013 and 2015, Speier created an extensive complex of works focusing on social interaction in everyday life, which she staged in layered image spaces using a fusion of photography, painting, and cut out techniques. In front of black-and-white pictures of interiors, exaggerated protagonists – or rather their heads and limbs, because their bodies are concealed like human bill boards - smoke, observe, gesticulate and interact. The sandwich boards are formed from corrugated, high-gloss food photograph cutouts of toast, fried eggs, vegetables, and jelly. The harmless lightness of the sceneries interspersed with gestures of social control; distinction and exclusion are enticingly colourful and uncanny at the same time. These works can be regarded as a projection space for the social and pictorial structures in our present in several ways. They tell of a self-optimised individual who is aware of the meaning of interpersonal relationships in value chains and is always prepared to put all the aspects of their existence in the service of the creative economy. They also relate to the sensual presentation of food in social networks. This is not so much a contemporary version of the memento mori in art history as a reference to the commodification of desire for the 'good life' promised by advertisement, which is continuously kept running by algorithmically replicated cycles. And last, but not least, they relate to the aesthetic aspirations of our times, that art itself is 'instagramable' and looks good as a digital reproduction on various platforms, where the borders between art, commerce, pop and everyday culture dissolved long ago.

With that said, in her works, Anne Speier explores the social state as well as the forms of subjectivities that they bring forth to grasp the present. Occasionally, the hybrid creatures mentioned above pick up the scent. For instance in a series of works with sculptures consisting of dinosaur legs with long, thin tongues, that ecstatically lick the walls of the exhibition space (*Feeling the Wall*, 2015) or attempt to reach the ceiling (*Feeling the Ceiling*, 2015). *Feeling the Contemporary*, (2015), is the name of a creature that sticks its tongue into the air as if the zeitgeist in its particles could be tasted. But this does not appear to be visible; the tongues are fitted directly onto the dinosaurs' feet - no body, no head, and certainly no eyes. Here the immediate sense of touch is set against the primacy of the distant visual sense. Graphically prepared, printed on Aludibond and capturing every taste bud, the surface of the tongue, which ushers the affective –tactile into the exhibition space, where, after all, touching is forbidden, is accordingly detailed. With the nearly obscene corporeality of the tongues, Anne Speier sets an associative game of boundary crossing in motion, targeting the rules and conventions of the art field and its institutions.

Following a wild orang-utan with shaggy red hair and expressive gestures hanging from the ceiling (*Funky Monkey, What Are You Afraid Of?*, 2017), the latest addition in the artist's park of hybrid creatures does not conform with etiquette either. The robot dog (*Taucher*, 2018) voraciously plunges its head in the ground, that at the same time threatens to devour it or the reverse, and which it attempts to pierce through in complete ignorance of physical spatial boundaries. The technoid-creatural menacingly indicates the unconscious of the space and the hierarchies and power structures assigned to it, and hints at a crisis of this social order¹. Anne Speier addressed the ideological charging of architectural structures in a series of earlier works (including *A Door is just a Metaphor*, 2017), in which she uses the figure of an open or closed door as a constitutive element of the

¹ cf. Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space. Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, Cambridge / Mass., London 2000 and Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, Chicago 2006.

image space. This symbolises the 'open-door policy,' which like 'desk sharing' or 'open office space' in more recent management approaches, dissolves strong spatial hierarchies replacing them with transparency and self-responsibility, to optimise performance, promote motivation and increase efficiency in employees. Collaged in large-format, the abstracted door elements form tilted levels that act as an insecure foundation for vase-like vessels. These carriers of meaning can be filled with virtually anything, but, at the same time, they build a clearly delimited, although placeless entity. Speier combines different paintings methods, for example the atmospheric wet-on-wet technique with digital and screen print in juxtaposed layers, in which she integrates disruptive elements and that she ultimately reworks with different painting techniques in oil.

Her latest paintings proceed from here. The connecting element is a prospectively distorted space within the image space, which marks an inside and an outside. The moment of social inclusion or exclusion is captured in *Teacher - Raum von innen betrachtet* (2018), in which the positions, gestures and in particular the extent of their three-dimensionality establish that these three figures are endowed with power or impotence. While the power structures are clearly identifiable here, *Offnbch Pst – Raum als Information* (2018) indicates a tussle with an open ending. In the era of post-truth the institution of the daily newspaper is being torpedoed; counter-information no longer signifies an emancipatory fight for the democratisation of interpretational sovereignty, but the exact opposite instead. The clenched militant fist of the 1920s has been co-opted, the reconquest is written in the stars. And these have already been fetched from the sky for the evaluation of services on social platforms.