

Ulrike Müller

Container Contained

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Press Release

Ulrike Müller's works are hermetic, psychologically intense, and sexually explicit. In graphic works, videos, performances, as well as exhibition history, her work is identified with feminist and lesbian issues. Minimally colored and diagrammatic, her drawings are cool and hot at the same time. – Miranda McClintic, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York, 2007

Austria-born, New York-based artist Ulrike Müller takes shared emotions as a point of departure for making and reflecting on art and its critical position. Everything she makes takes full advantage of its medium. [...] After Müller moved to New York in 2002 she joined the team that co-edits the magazine LTTR (initials which throughout its five issues have stood for phrases from “Lesbians to the Rescue” to “Lacan Teaches to Repeat.”) Instead of protesting what they don't want, Müller and cohort act out what they do want: a feminist ethics for the present. – Larissa Harris, MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies, Cambridge, MA, 2007

Ulrike Müller is an Austria-born, New York-based artist who, for the past ten years has created a feminist, theoretical, and frankly activist body of work that situates art making as means to (en)action. Müller is deeply involved with both language and body as vehicles of human expression. Through her conscious manipulation of both, she goads viewers to critically examine the motives, as well as the very means, of communication between the artist and the spectator, the speaker and the listener. – Laura Hoptman, New Museum, New York, 2008

Ulrike Müller is an Austria-born, New York-based artist whose practice encompasses both art making and community organizing. Her work, which can be seen as an extension of feminist movements from the 1970s onward, utilizes text, performance, publishing, as well as drawing and painting to create spaces of excitement and humor. The artist's use of narrative, language, and abstraction functions to break down traditional binary systems, creating new options by addressing contemporary feminist and genderqueer concerns. – Alexander Freeman, Artpace, San Antonio, TX, 2010

Ulrike Müller employs a production process that has historically been used across cultures as a decorative art, but also by industry for the production of signs and utilitarian objects. Müller adopts this firing technique to produce images that repurpose a range of modernist vocabularies. The individual works are intimate in scale but irradiate their forms outward, decompressing contents embedded within and under the hard polish of their reflective surfaces. Often the image is determined with a vertical division of the space in half. While drawing the eye up and down, the vertical bifurcation further allows for the transposing of forms in any direction to tease out a representational logic. – Photios Giovanis, Callicoon Fine Arts, New York, 2014

In her artistic work, Ulrike Müller explores the relationships between abstraction and bodies through a conception of painting that is not limited to brush and canvas. Investigations of the visual strategies of modernism and of feminist practices of the 1960s and 1970s result in images that are closely related to current questions of body and identity politics. The geometries of figure and color in her compositions are never “purely” abstract. They carry erotic and sexual associations, they tease, touch, and penetrate each other without collapsing into binary logics. Müller uses abstraction as an idiom that can be figuratively appropriated, emotionally charged and politically connoted—depending on the context and the viewer. – Manuela Ammer, Mumok, Vienna, 2015

Ulrike Müller's most recent series of abstract paintings, "Others" (2015), deftly assail their modernist precedents: a lurid figuration arises from the meticulously crafted compositions of geometric forms, suggesting that libidinal forces have perhaps always been present, albeit marginalized, in the history of modernism. The portrait-sized, enamel-on-steel paintings recall historical episodes when artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and László Moholy-Nagy embraced this technique for its industrial origins in sign making, hiring fabricators to create works that ultimately critiqued commodity production; Müller, however, takes the opposite tack, honing her enamel works step by step in her studio, thereby emphasizing the technique's handicraft possibilities. Combined with the artist's seductive palette, the enamel's lustrous surface softens the hard-edged contours of her geometric shapes, twisting masculine paradigms of modernist abstraction with craft-based sensuality in a manner similar as well to the artist's woven rugs. In *Rug (gato de cochinilla)* (2015), for example, a field of abstract forms frames the face of a black cat, cross-pollinating the masculine cliché of schematic design and painting (the artist might hang the rug on a wall to induce such an association) with the stereotyped feminine sentiment accompanying domestic animals and weaving. – Erica Cooke, Whitney Museum, New York, 2017

With *Container*, her comprehensive solo exhibition at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande and Westfalen, Müller transfers some of her compositional strategies to the exhibition space. By painting the walls of the Kunstverein the architecture has been transformed into a three-dimensional pictorial space that one walks into. It becomes a container for a dynamic approach to painting, which simultaneously activates and disrupts medium-specific expectations and limitations – as the illustration on the invitation suggests. Analogous to visitors' movements in the space, individual image elements 'flit' from one group of works to the next. They repeat themselves selectively and alternately appear in the enamel paintings, carpets, monotypes, and collages created for the exhibition in Düsseldorf. The motifs of these compositions – such as circles, curves, and triangles, or shoes, vases, and cats – often come from tangible everyday objects or found illustrations. For example, the high-heeled shoes on the carpets are taken from a cobbler's advertising sign, which was the template for Müller's first work on enamel back in 2010. For her, drawings with such trivial content serve as templates for the industrially produced glass powder that she applied to steel plates, and then fuses in the kiln to form a hard layer of colored enamel. Or for the Rugs woven from local natural fibers by Zapotec weavers in Mexico. Lastly, the formal vocabulary characteristic of the artist appears in an accelerated way in her monotypes, the most recent group of works to be seen at the Kunstverein for the first time. This printmaking technique combines painting and drawing, thus interweaving her main approaches, while transparent, overlapping colored surfaces also animate the images. In Ulrike Müller's hybrid *Container*, painting is encountered as a decentered, polymorphic area of tension without clear limitations. It is circled over and again to mobilize instabilities and ambiguities beyond standardized patterns of experience and classifications. – Eva Birkenstock, Kunstverein Düsseldorf, 2018