

## Rachel Harrison

*Villeperdue*

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What would an archaeologist, or rather someone, let's say like Lara Croft in a future video game or action movie, think about Rachel Harrison's compilation of obscure objects of civilization, if he would dig out an exhibition of the American artist in two thousand years? Clothing, food, tools, containers of various kinds or the representation of these things would come to light. But would they also add up to form a coherent narrative?

Harrison's works combine various elements that couldn't be more disparate, into heterogeneous, complex (John Kelsey calls her works complexes instead of combines in order distance them from Rauschenberg) objects, images, and videos. Her selection, her view on things, draws attention to a broad range of meanings. So a package of soup cubes may be a readymade, but it also refers to the French Renaissance poet and satirist François Rabelais.

The speed with which she establishes interrelations between her works is just as quick as her humor. If the mixing of forms, media, and strategies still is a crucial aspect of contemporary art, with Harrison it becomes slapstick. She combines objets trouvés with artist-made elements, abstraction and figuration, and she has a number of representatives of art history, such as Duchamp, Kippenberger, and Matisse, appear alongside figures from the media, like the singer Amy Winehouse or the 5000- year-old alpine mummy from the Ötztal, whose origin as Austrian or Italian was fought about for years.

Footwear appears in various forms, the view on the soles of a pair of modern sneaker, a caveman with fur shoes, a painting of a shoe after Philip Guston and on top of that a fake bronze polyester cast of a well worn soccer shoe. Might it be possible that the invention of shoes is as relevant for the development of humanity as the upright gait? The upright posture, which was important for the history of sculpture and especially for the statue, is at least in two of Harrison's works turned upside down. Here engaged and free leg stick up like Dadaist leg-relics or amputations in vases.

And the reclining figure, which is predominantly female in art history, is played by Iceman Ötzi and the aging Kippenberger, who, lying at Amy Winehouse's feet, makes a drawing with his green fingernails with a nonchalant, pretty feminine gesture. What the three of them share is that they are all already dead. The latter two also share a unique position as artists'-artists, who owe that role not only to their unquestioned skills but also to their much-discussed extensive lifestyle—and in Harrison's paintings, they have the same green nail polish. The paintings are based on digitally processed crossfadings of different visual sources, including Harrison's own drawings of 2012, which in this way can be recycled and are available in various sizes and details. The paintings use print and paint on canvas, which makes a clear division of each level even more difficult.

It is paradoxical that Rachel Harrison's work, despite its extroversion and directness, is hard to decipher in the end and that it is precisely the variety of explicit references and intensities that collapses the construction of meaning again. But perhaps it is all quite easy on the other hand, like the meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table, or like the shortest short story "Encounter" by Daniil Kharms, who is also interested in the absurd collision of subject, object and language in such a preeminent way: *"So one day this guy was going to work, and on the way he met another guy who having bought a loaf of Polish bread went back home where he came from. And that's basically it."*

(Text: Anette Freudenberger)