

ULRIKE MÜLLER

For Now

11.02.– 25.03. 2023

lately you say I've had an awkward
pull
toward the past tense
my remarks renovate
details in oil

pantoufles all over again
in the slippery something that
should be your mind
does it matter about heels¹

Ulrike Müller's diverse artistic practice – which, in addition to the enamel and rug works, monotypes, collages and wall painting shown here, also includes drawing, performance as well as publication and curation projects – slips, like the shoe or mind in Rosemarie Waldrop's poem, through time and its forms, shuffles in slippers, stumbles on heels through modernity, pulling backwards, drawing forwards. Müller's pull towards the past tense is manifest in her citations and re-writings of the history of abstract painting – Constructivism, Geometric Abstraction, Neo-Geo, Feminist Formalism – which she breaks down, reassembling their elements into new compositions, but never into a totality, suspending closure and completion. That way, her images do not present modernism as a self-contained project, but rather as a constant search for other forms of expression and formal renewals: *the old expressions are with us always and there are always others*. A simultaneity of the novel and the bygone, of past and present tense, of *post* and *now* – a temporality also inherent in the exhibition's title that is borrowed from the New York poet Eileen Myles: *For now*. The end, for now. That's it, over, goodbye, for the moment. A postponed end. A joke without the finality of a punch line.

The joke is told across different groups of works: individual pictorial elements move from one series to the next, snippets of color and form repeat and subtly switch their mediums and grounds; something appears in an enamel painting, then on canvas, paper or rug, carries forward. The cat, in the letter or e-mail box a moment ago, that is, on the invitation card, shoo shoo, hop hop, now she's purring on the wall. Picked up as a stray, put into the picture, then straight to the gallery, *ein Katzensprung*. Figurative elements absorb abstraction and appear more as signs than as clear references. They are hints, set pieces, scraps of figuration that, like syllables, do not yet form an intelligible figure, a whole word, but rather a sound, a hunch, a misunderstanding. A stutter, a childlike babble, an aphasic phonetic disorder.

¹ Rosemarie Waldrop, "Kind Regards," in *Gap Gardening: Selected Poems*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, p. 56.

The dissolution of the linguistic sound system in aphasics provides an exact mirror-image for the phonological development in child language, writes Jakobson, writes for and not of, as if aphasia made the child's acquisition of speech possible in the first place and with it every production of sound in developmental stages, as if it held the mirror or provided rules, folie oder folly.²

The disintegration of language as fundamental to the first attempts at language acquisition. Speech loss, noise, and missing words as reflections of first babble words. Müller slides and stumbles, like the linguistic outliers child and aphasic, in snippet language through modernist abstraction. With stencils, templates and color schemes from archives and everyday visual culture, she dissects, cuts, mixes, melts, fixes and dyes the mother tongue painting; combines the rigor of abstract-constructive principles and geometric forms with the suppleness of domestic colors and fleeting figuration.

and in one bubble swims Jakobson, saying: children with their wild sounds, with their first blustering babble, are able to produce any imaginable sound of any language, the bubble rises, which they'll soon forget, the bubble floats pregnant with meaning above the afternoon, once they acquire their mother tongue, the bubble pops³

Sophia Rohwetter

² Uljana Wolf, „Babeltrack (Notes on a Lengevitch)“ (translated by Sophie Seita), in *Subsisters: Selected Poems*. Brooklyn: Belladonna, p. 146.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.