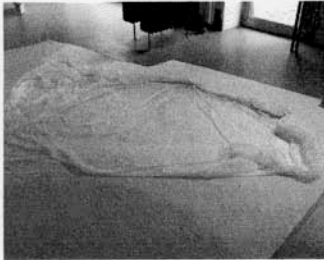


REVIEWS

BERLIN

KARLA BLACK

GALERIE SANDRA BÜRGEL



KARLA BLACK, *Mistakes Made Away From Home* (detail), 2006. Plaster, vaseline, paint, polythene, eyeshadow, 8 x 4 m. Courtesy Galerie Sandra Bürgel, Berlin.

Opened last September, the space of Galerie Sandra Bürgel disconcerts by virtue of its immense windows and industrial architectural details, rendered particularly conspicuous by a white, pared down, almost immaterial exhibition, which starts at ground level. For the first few steps, the visitor is obliged to carefully cut between a prominent heater and an expanse of dry, unmixed plaster, which extends all the way to the door. Karla Black, residing in Glasgow, worked in situ with her surroundings. Other sculptures — this time in volume — bring together paper, cardboard, cellophane, wood and chalk, to other more unusual materials, such as toothpaste, vaseline, shampoo and gel, which seem to constitute links to gestural painting. The more-or-less poetic, colorful, fortuitous and deliberate union of these elements subvert an eminently physical practice, which never ceases to experiment with the articulation of its materials, even exploring those which are more intimate, such as the ones used for the body. A lovely coincidence with the history of the place: where just a few years ago artificial flowers were fabricated in abundance, there are works which deploy a certain artifice with domestic tones. Of the feminist generation and its performative practices, Karla Black has maintained its energy, firm attitude, marked sense of the flesh and its perversions, as well as a certain evanescence, her sculptures changing from site to site. It's in a similar spirit that Sandra Bürgel intends to develop her program: more than a precise concept, it's more a question, among the young artists who she will exhibit, of substance than formal composition, of structure than theory. This gallery seems resolutely turned toward the body and its language, toward human beings and their relationship to the world.

Aurélien Voltz

(Translated from French by Chris Sharp)

KRISTINA GIRKE

GALERIE MICHAEL SCHULTZ



KRISTINA GIRKE, *Der Hirte*, 2006. Mixed media on canvas, 260 x 200 cm. Courtesy Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin.

These paintings are disconcerting. Pictorial components arranged in perspective make it difficult to discern a spatial structure, thus giving the impression that the viewer is wandering between the centuries. Timeless spaces, in distorted perspective, are filled diachronously with various symbols of human history: archaic signs, cubes reminiscent of early tombs and at the same time of minimal art cubes, Baroque ornaments, reproduced as contemporary graphic elements on the fringes of kitsch, putti and figures pilfered from Renaissance painting.

These spaces, at first glance devoid of any reference point, are reminiscent of the 'end of history.' That which was most impressively in the air in the classical period and now, in our globalized world, is once more increasing in significance. But what is being globalized above all today is the image: an intelligible icon in a world increasingly deprived of regional languages, in which meaning is

created through value-charged signs. Meaning is no longer sought behind the world of the visible, but lies precisely in evaluations of visible signs set in a relationship with each other. What remains is just the movement of dissemination, the quotation and re-quotation of symbols. The associated definition of these symbols has become an end in itself. The space of history has curved back on itself.

Girke's images are large narratives: they read all these diachronous signs to us and allow us to connect them with each other within the frozen time that presents them to us. The eye has to keep moving. Often a figure that could be considered a principal motif is to be found on the edge of the picture, creating a relationship with the center by the way it is positioned. This can then be filled in its turn with small-format groups of figures, cubes that are sucked into the central perspective by an invisible centrifugal force, and also details of landscapes or ornaments. It is much more the intelligibility of the connections, created by the imbalance between the principal motif, picture center and parragon (ornament, motif framing, etc.) that makes Girke's pictures into narratives.

Adina Popescu

(Translated from German by Michael Robinson)

ALLAN MCCOLLUM

GALERIE THOMAS SCHULTE

Allan McCollum applies a neat conceptual twist to the relationship of content and form, by questioning the idea of the unique art object, but not by comparing it to mass-produced items. The artist invents simple strategies to systematically develop unique shapes and then produces a selection as prints, sculptures, souvenirs, etc. The artist is concerned with the shapes as such, leaving their potential for symbolic meaning untouched. For his ongoing 'shape-project' McCollum has embarked on producing as many individual shapes as there are people inhabiting the planet. For his Berlin show the artist produced white objects of Corian, a plastic that is usually used for countertops, for its marble-like appearance. Machine cut and sanded down to unique forms that look organic, repetitive and schematic, the pieces are set on elegant black plinths, a presentation form resembling the way much small abstract sculptural work was presented in the '50s and '60s. This way everything looks conservative and outdated, as if McCollum was turning his shapes into surrogate sculptures, trying to make fun of them at the same time.

It is impossible not to see this new work in relation to the artist's 'individual objects' work of the late '80s, a turquoise mass of ten thousand somewhat muted objects presented on a huge table, like ten thousand hand grenades. What they allowed the viewer to do was discover the potential of symbolic value in every single one of these objects. But the application of a formula to the number of shapes, linking them to population, life and consequently death, makes me feel uncomfortable; it just sounds like ecological kitsch. On the other hand, I don't like the idea of being a shape in somebody's scheme, because it renders me powerless. And of course I, like everybody, am already part of a multitude of political, economic and social schemes, towards which I have relatively little power. Maybe Allan McCollum is starting to be cynical.

Andreas Schlaegel