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STEFANIE GUTHEIL - Zwei Null Zwei Null

BIANCA KENNEDY - We're all in this together

Curated by Philipp Bollmann

Opening : Friday, 23 October 2020, 12-21 h

Duration : 24 October - 23 December 2020

Stefanie Gutheil presents two series of works completed this year. The artist calls a central work of the exhibition „Quarantine“. A fitting title, as it is symptomatic for the past months. Stefanie Gutheil was "forced" by external circumstances to spend more time than usual in the studio. Or was it rather a privilege after all? With one of the last planes coming in from New York, she just managed to stock up on enough paint and stretchers before the lockdown started. In her case that meant: Off to the studio! The resulting question can only be: how does an artist react to this involuntary "deprivation of liberty"? Or shouldn't one speak here of a "gain in liberty"? Quite obvious: She starts to paint!

The viewer of the painting "Quarantine" looks at the facade of a house, in which open windows provide a view inside. The people shown are characterized by dominant eye areas. A man in a striped sweater, whose dog comfortably lays his paw on his shoulder, lets down a basket of Easter eggs - possibly a reference to the beginning of the lockdown in the spring of this year - on a string, which is greedily received by outstretched hands at the lower edge of the painting. A person in the window above is tempted to step out of the semi-darkness to reach for the string. But it is hard to believe that she has the willpower to actually take action. The other inhabitants of the house do not seem to care. Caught in overwhelming boredom, even the simplest activities seem to be exhausting. Small gestures become events. Their reverberation is missing. A woman in a black and red check shirt - reminiscent of Sylvia von Harden, portrayed by Otto Dix - lets down a roll of toilet paper. Is she one of the hamster buyers? The expressive painting style and the strongly rejuvenated perspective increase the feeling of narrowness. It is a two-dimensional way of painting that Gutheil chooses here. Proportions are suspended. It is about the inner life - and to remain in the picture - not about the facade. Paradoxically, the isolation is increased in the painting "Group Picture". Although protected by a mask, the figures are crowded into a very small space. Their looks seem staggered, frightened, turned inwards. They do not fixating a certain insidence, but rather a state that seems to put the persons equally into resignation and rigidity: a crowd united in helplessness and yet alone. It is our collective fears, our doubts and the perplexity that the artist makes us encounter in this series. The painter comments with humor that these are sometimes exaggerated.

The situation is different with the second series of works in the exhibition. It is also marked by doubts, but they are of a completely different nature. Here Gutheil attempts to question the stereotypical representation of the sexes. In other words, she tries to give the figure between the sexes an image or, as in "Netflix and Chill", to attempt an allegory in the form of hybrid beings. A female centaur lifts a blanket under which the fish tail of a mermaid appears. These are chimeras, which are very familiar to us from legends and myths. The pictorial union of man and animal in one figure has been present in different cultures since the Stone Age. On the one hand it is about positive aspects multiplying in the hybrid beings, on the other hand being different is always a burden. In "Nudist Beach" we also discover two characters who deal with animal anatomies. It is not so much about the merging of humans and animals, but rather the figures deal with animal body parts. An unclothed figure kneels in a giant snail shell on a lawn. Here the snail is taken up in

its symbolic function as a hermaphrodite, which cannot be categorized as either female or male. In the foreground of the picture there is a woman standing on a towel, dressed only in socks and slippers, and seems to be very surprised about a long, cat-like tail that seems to grow out of her buttocks. As in many of Gutheil's sceneries, people who deal with existential questions are placed in a dream world that is removed from reality, almost psychedelic. Here the strength of Gutheil's painting is revealed: In a naive-expressionistic way of painting she succeeds in creating pictures that penetrate deep into our consciousness. And thus the pictures challenge the recipient to meet himself, to form an opinion and to take a stand. Bei it the topics around the corona pandemic or transidentity. From this point of view, the circle of the two series of works, which at first glance appear very different, comes full circle. The artist is interested in nothing less than giving a face to the diverse and often very personal facets of human existence.

Bianca Kennedy combines in her three-channel installation "We're all in this together" (2018), which was awarded the TOY-Berlin Masters Prize, over two hundred and fifty film clips in which the bathtub marks the location of a wide variety of actions. Although the function and meaning of the protagonist could be ascribed to the bathtub here due to its exposed focus, it acts more as a stage on which we encounter various types of human behavior and moods and thus ultimately ourselves. Personal hygiene becomes a minor matter here. It is the existential themes that are visualised in the excerpts: Birth, sexuality and death, in between scenes from life with all its facets: In the tub, people read, write, splash, dive, drink, smoke, smoke pot, kiss, love, laugh, sing, cry, mourn, argue, sleep, shoot and kill. Some of it alone, sometimes as a couple or in a larger group. Much in color, some in black and white. Sometimes in a luxurious ambience, sometimes in dirty water, sometimes during the day, sometimes under neon light. The bare skin is omnipresent. But we also encounter all kinds of curiosities and peculiarities: A telephoning teddy bear (Ted, 2012), an ice-eating mermaid (Aquamarine, 2016) or even the attack of eerie creatures in a cozy wet area (A Nightmare on Elm Street, 1984) illustrate the fusion of fantasy and reality in the film. The series "Portraits of taking a bath in movies" (2016 - 2020) complements the visual examination of the bathtub as a theme.

In the drawings on Japanese tissue paper, the artist uses fineliner and brushmarker to approach selected film scenes. Here, however, the styles serve as the object of artistic interpretation. With lively and rhythmic strokes, Kennedy translates the original into her own handwriting. It is to be attested to the attempt to reproduce the depicted persons at least to the extent that associations with the film remain clear. The figures remain largely colorless. The backgrounds are rather hinted at or develop from colored ornamentation. In this way, the artist not only alienates the original scene, but also its former mood and character.

The third element of the exhibition will be the virtual reality experience "VR we're all in this together" (2018). Here Kennedy combines her drawings into virtual three-dimensional space and offers visitors an immersive bathing experience. The 360° animation now enables the viewer to leave his place as a voyeur, get into the tub himself and take a bath with six different film characters simultaneously. In her artistic approach, Kennedy thus detaches the 3 works / work series of already existing sequences from their dramaturgical context in order to re-contextualize them through thematic sorting and dialogue. In doing so, it generates a new image that seems strangely familiar to us and makes it clear that we all - regardless of our respective experiences - fall back on a collective image archive. This is how - to take up the title "We're all in this together".

