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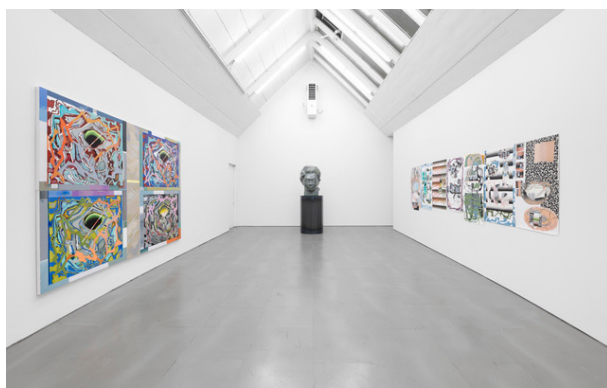
The invitation to curate an exhibition for the 30-year jubilee of the Carlier Gebauer Gallery in Berlin gave rise to the question of what to show on such an occasion. The exhibition should not be devoted to recounting the history of the gallery nor aim at illustrating its programme. In my view this exhibition is an improvisation without a fixed theme; it should make sense simply in terms of the works shown. "Believing not in theory but in the visual evidence of the show," is how I put this to Rachel Harrison, when she asked about the subject matter of the exhibition, and this concept was accepted.



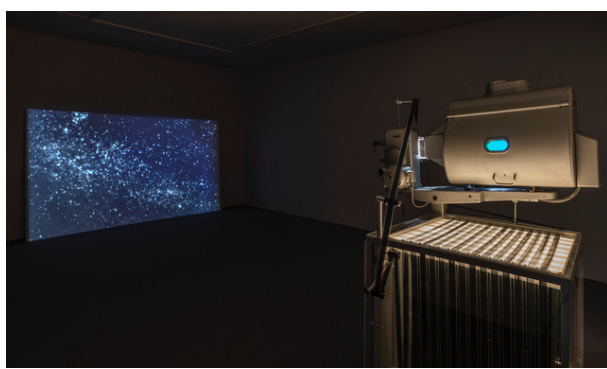
The narrow entry hall of the gallery serves as a showcase for drawings and also as an introduction to the exhibition. In the large central exhibition space there are groups of paintings by Paul Mogensen and Harriet Korman, along with sculptural pieces by Leonor Antunes and Rachel Harrison in between. I have been following the work of Mogensen and Korman for several decades. Notwithstanding the grounding of their painting in its own prerequisites, decisions still have to be taken. In this connection Mogensen has used the expression "the artist's prerogative" in conversation with me. He works with progressions of squares, which when arranged in succession across the picture plane in combination with their respective colours create various constellations. Neither title, date nor signature are allowed, as they might distract from the painting. For her most recent cycle of paintings Korman began with oil pastel drawings, which she then transposed to canvas. The concentric symmetrical arrangements are interpreted using pure colours, so that unvarying intensity cancels out any hint of spatial illusion. What she says about Braque's still lifes applies equally to her own work: that it is impossible to conceive of such pictures in advance and plan them, and that the forms can only be found through the process of painting.



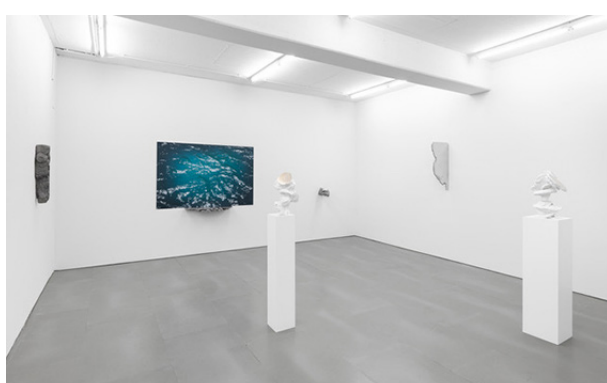
As so often, the sculpture by Harrison shown here is in essence a standing figure on a plinth. Instead of disrupting the statuary setting, the framework is extended and modified by Harrison, who pays great attention to detail. Hence, the selfie stick protruding between the bars takes the place of a gesture, as if reassuring the figure about its 'real' situation. Antunes addresses models from the history of abstraction with precision, in this case a drawing by the English artist Mary Martin, which she has enlarged and replicated using brass rods. Not being content with a mere historical reference, Antunes exploits the qualities that the sculptural material offers—weight, kinetics, tactile appeal, metallic shine—in order to divide and articulate the space.



In the second large exhibition space Thomas Schütte's ceramic figures encounter pictures by Luis Gordillo. Schütte works with a repertoire of small-scale heads referring back to the tradition of figurative sculpture. He interprets and transforms these heads by enlarging them in the ceramic workshop, reworking the positive form and finally adding a glaze. The spatial arrangement of the ceramics frames the room—to the front, a huge compact female figure with her head at peace with itself, and five grotesque male heads by the rear wall—turning the space into a veritable stage. This spatial impact of the figures is more important to Schütte than their individual shapes and colours, which are free to surprise him. Gordillo's painting also deals with the head as subject matter; he is a figurative painter, even if this is not immediately obvious. Drawing on various sources he playfully subjects this preliminary material to painterly treatment involving representation, mirroring, doubling and shift in a word: deception, especially in the sense of trompe l'oeil. This is evident in the fourfold Uccello painting and in a series of sheets that are spread out over the wall like pages from a notebook.



Rosa Barba conceives of the projection of a film as a sculptural intervention into a space. "Send Me Sky, Henrietta" is based on photographs of stars taken by the American astronomer Henrietta S. Leavitt; the pulsating light enabled her to measure the distances within the galaxies. The film shows shots of photo plates and notes in the archives of the Harvard Observatory; it runs in an endless loop across a light table and then through the projector, thus being actually present as matter in the here and now. Flickering spots of light appear on the wall-size projection surfaces as a result, in an analogy to those heavenly bodies.



In the final room a group of "Sculptures aveugles" by Michael François is being shown for the first time. These figures have been shaped in polystyrene by the artist keeping his eyes closed, and then cast in aluminium. This blindness passes literally from the sculptor to the figures in a similar manner to the 'automatic' writing of "écriture automatique". François' sculptures look as if they have emanated from the walls or been dragged out of water, which distinguishes them from the organic serenity of Arp's "concrétions". They are blind and amorphous, and yet each figure has a polished surface, and this can indeed "see", as it reflects the viewer and the space, creating interconnections and prompting the imagination.

The exhibition at Carlier Gebauer in Berlin runs until February 23, 2022.

Dieter Schwarz