

FEUILLETON

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On one picture the colors seem adrift, as if they are waiting for someone to mix them together. There is more to read elsewhere: “Don’t attack”, “Stop the massacre of...” Many pictures hang in double registers, one above the other. A picture all alone inside a cabinet. Here, a tatty chair positioned in front of a picture; there, an exhaust fan that spins endlessly on video.

BY HANS JOACHIM MÜLLER

This and that. And everything has one author, these works, and yet they look so disparate and they hang on the walls in her installations without any obvious cohesion that one might actually feel like attending a group show about contemporary painting inside the gallery rooms of the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva.

Rochelle Feinstein. Even as an art world insider, the spectator will not get a precise idea of the oeuvre of the almost 70-year-old American. Never before has it been exhibited at a museum. And now that it is on display as extensive as it is, it creates doubt whether the classical („werkbegriff“) is applicable at all to this type of artistic production. Everything appears to be false. Also – and perhaps even more so – the term “production”.

This premiere is almost unbelievable. One could state that this artist has had a professorship at Yale University in New Haven and thus wasn’t dependent on presence, on assimilation towards the market and collectors. But what artist, male or female, doesn’t want to present oneself with his/her own work, doesn’t want to compete with the works of art that surround him or her? It’s not that she knowingly eschewed, nor that she secluded herself; the alliance with the public just didn’t come along.

Maybe this couldn’t have been achieved because all of these pictures, writing-drawings (“schriftzeichnung”), photo and video works lack the willingness to form any sort of alliance. Because they possess something that is not utilizable, some genome of art market incompetence.; something that allows the pictures to distance themselves from common strategies of attracting attention. Every picture turns into a demonstration of casualness or a presentation of an unprocessed state, appears to be rapidly conducted, left half-done, without this representational outfit, in which pictures usually leave the studio to appear in public.

It is difficult to imagine these pictures as being composed. They rather fall off from thinking and feeling, originating incidentally, much like charts, diagrams and notes that accompany a private script. Painting, one could say, is reified

thinking for Rochelle Feinstein, one, which has the format of an essay that alludes a topic and acts it out, holds it in suspense and doesn’t bring it to a conclusion.

Hence an intellectual art-making that doesn’t aim for the picture to be a collector’s item. Instead, what becomes all the more obvious is what incited her to produce art in the first place. Here, an examination of abstract painting and there of conceptual art, of the appearances of pictures in art spaces; sometimes it is a play with the language

work one should actually speak of “prefiguration” – if the term hadn’t been used already. Pictures directed at pictures.

And when Rochelle Feinstein painted alongside her teaching position, then occasionally decided to leave a painting to her New York gallery On Stellar Rays, agreeing to do a retrospective of that late Estate; those are all just modes of an artist experiment, which has always been concerned with the question what it could possibly mean to make pictures in a way as to detach them from

territories. Certainly, this assumption changes instantly when Feinstein explains that she was thinking about a busted condom while painting, and that the picture was created as an immediate response to the AIDS-trauma of the 1990s. “Geography” leads far away, essentially formalizing the impetus for painting. But she doesn’t try to conceal this impetus by any means. She relinquishes her pictures – which all exhibit inaccessible motifs, all grounded in reflexes, affects, abstract and non-argumentative contemplations – to their destiny in the public realm, a destiny for which their private origin is no longer responsible.

But it is not always as strict. Based on her grand tour throughout Europe she created a triptych of her memory, its right panel depicting text boxes on the background of a German flag that ask in gothic letters: “Feinstein, is that a German name or a Jewish name?” Here, one obviously doesn’t need any assistance.

But such a high level of accessibility is rather the exception in her oeuvre and appears almost flat. More defining are her hermetic diary illustrations. On one picture, which recalls a hand-drawn bus map, Rochelle Feinstein connected distant dots with lines that run across the entire North American continent in order to mark those cities where her boyfriend cheated on her with other women. Do we have to know this? The picture doesn’t reveal its story. Without the story it is a scrawly grid, a pattern, as it appears in various versions again and again.

If this oeuvre exhibits any stylistic coherence after all, it will be those abstract grids. Clusters made of tiny rectangles, hand-drawn hatchings of circular or cubistic lines, quadratic sets that recall Josef Albers arranged geometries, pictorial windows that succeed one another like in a graphic novel, awning-like color-weaves. One work that traces back to doodles seems to be knitted of fine stitches that stretch all over the surface like spider webs.

But if one enumerates such forms that are void of signifiers, all the signifier-less formlessness comes to mind, this gestic way of painting, those drifting clouds of color that co-exist equivalently. What, however, does not exist? A Feinstein-layout. No passable way traces the flat picture, void of signifiers, from the wall back to its origin inside the studio; that is the secret of this oeuvre.

■ Rochelle Feinstein: In Anticipation of Women’s History Month. Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève; 24. April



COURTESY OF ON STELLA RAYS, NEW YORK AND THE ARTIST PHOTO CREDIT: JAM RECH

Thought about the condom while brushing

For the first time: the nonconformist painter Rochelle Feinstein is to be discovered at her retrospective in Geneva which is as extensive as it is exciting

of advertisement, and yet other times with pop as a cultural habitat and comfort zone, the problematizing of the gender-topic, a reluctance for the dramaturgy of a classical artist-self-staging.

Ironic was the way the artist reacted to the financial crisis: by creating her own “pre-posthumous” estate. The rules for the estate were rigid: Henceforth works would only originate from already existing works. Pictures made of pictures. Which is yet another way to manifest the basic idea of a picture’s preliminary. In view of this peculiar

oneself; in a way that the intimate communication with them transitions into a pictorial state of existence on the wall where they don’t belong to oneself anymore, where they are virtually released into independence.

One picture is titled “Geography”. Given its stain-like, whitish central figure with its rutted contours, adhering to the quadratic canvas as if a paint bucket filled with viscous varnish had been spilled all over it, one could indeed think of a continental entity that was published in an atlas with as yet undiscovered