



Rochelle Feinstein, "Love Your Work" (1994 – 2014).

More than just an idiom

Rochelle Feinstein has been almost unknown for several years. Finally, the artist has her first museum exhibition at the Lenbachhaus Munich. It shows an oeuvre full of irony, refinement and ambiguity.

BY CATRIN LORCH

The last taboos in art? It won't be sex, nor money, everything checked off. But no artist wants to hear the brief sentence: "Love your work." Because it is the lowest common denominator that vernissage-attendees reduce their disinterest to. A salutation that doesn't translate to much more than a simply "Like": I don't know what to do with that, nobody else thinks it's relevant, but since you somehow seem to belong; I won't spoil your party. Rochelle Feinstein seized on this sentence and worked over 2 years on her series, *Love Vibe*. She is one, who 'belonged' in exactly this way for many years.

Born in New York in 1947, is where her life begins, a life that doesn't quite distinguish itself by too many solo-exhibitions or at least invitations to group shows. Feinstein did receive credit because she taught painting and printmaking as a professor at Yale University. Yale is the most eminent art academy in the United States. Many of her former students think highly of her, but yet even they cannot explain why.

Sure, the painting *Flag* was notorious. In 1993 Feinstein glued a dirty dishtowel onto a canvas and lengthened its plaid pattern to the edges of the canvas in scrawled, gaudy orange strokes. Sounds weird? More than that: It was a sheer arrogance from the viewpoint of an American art-historian.

If someone wanted to count as anything in the art canon, one would be wise to make his or her mark with a more respectful statement on abstract expressionism or pop art, instead of, as an unknown female painter, venturing on one icon of American art history; namely Jasper Johns' "Flag", an exact replica of the US flag from the fifties.

Feinstein didn't leave much of the star spangled banner; at best her painting resembles a dirty painting-rag, maybe also unfinished household chore. The painter even goes one better, in *Geography* (1994), spilling white, high-gloss paint on grey-brown linen, and suggests the association reminiscent of a busted condom. This proves, that Feinstein doesn't even intend to add on to those intellectual reflections that were once initiated by Kasimir Malewitsch's squares or New York abstraction. And that one can look at a smudge from a variety of different perspectives – a collapsed condom means something different to a woman than to the man involved.

In the early nineties neither a market nor a discourse existed in the United States that appreciated irony, refinement and ambiguity of such works. In Europe, for example Cologne, one would have understood it. Modeled by Sigmar Polke's fabrics, sensitized by Rosemarie Trockel's knit-pictures and stove tops, audiences would immediately be reminded of the intonation Martin Kippenberger's, but – at it's latest - reckless painting around the turn of the century would have embraced someone like Rochelle Feinstein. Would have. However, in New York: keep painting in the studio, keep teaching at the university.

The financial crisis in the year 2008, of all things, would change everything for Feinstein. Now she was only able to afford half of her storage space. And that she accumulated there was subjected to a tough re-arrangement. She cut canvases out of their framing, reassembled them into new works. And invited us to an exhibition of her estate at her gallery On Stellar Rays, as if she had already passed away. With her haphazard residual-canvas, a patch work that announces in big letters: "The Estate of Rochelle F."

But to come back to the taboo: As good as it can be. As an artist one can rather address whose condom is leaking under the bed sheet than to admit that only so much canvas remains; left behind, unsold, unseen. The huge speech bubbles on her paintings *Love Your Work* certainly resemble Andy Warhol's comic-pictures, but as an icon of pop art with a good ear he would have never ever, ever, alluded to such an event, if the products of his factory were waived aside using such idioms.

However, the bravery of these years caused Rochelle Feinstein – finally – to be seen and understood. And that she will be appreciated as a significant painter after all – at least in Europe. Because curator Stephanie Weber has arranged a museum-retrospective at Lenbachhaus, Munich, which will then travel to Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover. The last stop is indeed most exciting; the Bronx Museum has expressed its interest in the show. New York will learn to love her.