

Matthias Bitzer

Absence and Autopilot

09/17—11/12/2011

Transitions, connections and changes between various places and times are characteristic of Matthias Bitzer's work groups, the starting point of which is his interest in the hidden structures of constructing identity. The protagonists of his research—in previous works they were the writers Joseph Conrad (1857–1928) or Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935)—are frequently historical personalities whose biographies are shaped by contradictions and gaps. They have oftentimes been forgotten in collective memory, for example, the poet and artist Mina Loy (1882–1966) or the writer and co-founder of Dada, Emmy Ball-Hennings (1885–1948). Matthias Bitzer is never interested in the narrative illustration of the respective biographies, but instead in the subjective changeableness of reality. He translates the fragility of meaning and content into abstract narrative codes: The installation of his paintings, sculptures, collages and drawings establishes narrative relations between them and turns the existing exhibition space into a setting for new stories.

The works in the current show, Absence and Autopilot, no longer refer to a specific historical personality but create collages out of the most various historical biographies along with autobiographical excerpts of the artist himself. The 84-part work, The Phosphor Notes, presents individual components of various origin like in a kaleidoscope, which, when taken together, characterize Matthias Bitzer's oeuvre. One comes upon fragmented portraits and quotes of the actress, dancer and femme fatale Anita Berber (1899–1929), the quick-change artist Leopoldo Fregoli (1867–1936), the writers William S. Burroughs (1914–1997), Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), the diplomat and mistress of Napoléon III Comtessa Castiglione (1837–1899), the composer Kurt Weill (1900–1950), “old acquaintances” from earlier work groups such as Fernando Pessoa, Joseph Conrad and Emmy Ball-Hennings, poems and photographs by Matthias Bitzer himself, as well as hidden “admixtures” of befriended artists. Comparable to the transient, white flash of phosphor, individual narrative fragments “flash” into the

viewer's consciousness to then disappear again. Like the intimacy of a personal notebook, The Phosphor Notes reveal sources that are characteristic of Matthias Bitzer's work and in their large-scale visual simultaneity describe of a sense of time based on many different eras. This is also the case with the collages of photographs, sketches and text fragments of the works Anagrammatic Archive II and The Short Life. Here, the unique fragments of different origins are connected to form a nonlinear, non-hierarchical pattern. Depending on the angle of vision, white varnished letters appear on the surface of the glass frame. Similar to the literary movement of the Beat Generation in the 1950s, which stood for the dissolution of traditional text forms, verses and clear spatial and temporal references, this text and image collage simultaneously represents different storylines. Finally, the exhibition's sculptural works, such as the installation Skins, consisting of three different coloured showcases each containing a folded canvas, the abstract “sentence box” Untitled, the black neon tube of which shows the title Absence and Autopilot when lit, or the neon piece I used her skin as my skin, become abstract codes that, as an index, refer to as yet hidden narrations. The central sculpture of the show, Against Arbitrariness, opens up a totally abstract, almost ungraspable space of possible meanings that is “fixed” by individual geometric elements and yet is in a state of permanent dissolution. Intensified by the site-specific interventions such as the painted windows in the gallery, one experiences the individual moments of Matthias Bitzer's system of reference as a “passage”, one enters into a nonlinear conception of time, defined by simultaneity and infinity—a place where the invisible changes of identity occur behind the visible surface that appears to be always the same.

Biographical Notice:

Matthias Bitzer (*1975) lives and works in Berlin. In 2010 he has shown his solo exhibition at Kunstverein Hannover and he has received the Otto Dix Award in Gera. Further he participated at group exhibitions like at Kunsthalle Krems, Projects Arts Centre Dublin, Museum Mühlheim an der Ruhr, Kunsthalle Andratx Mallorca and Marta Herford Museum, that also has works of Matthias Bitzer in the permanent collection.



Anagrammatic Archive II, 2011
collage, lacquer on glass
143 × 103 × 5 cm

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upstairs

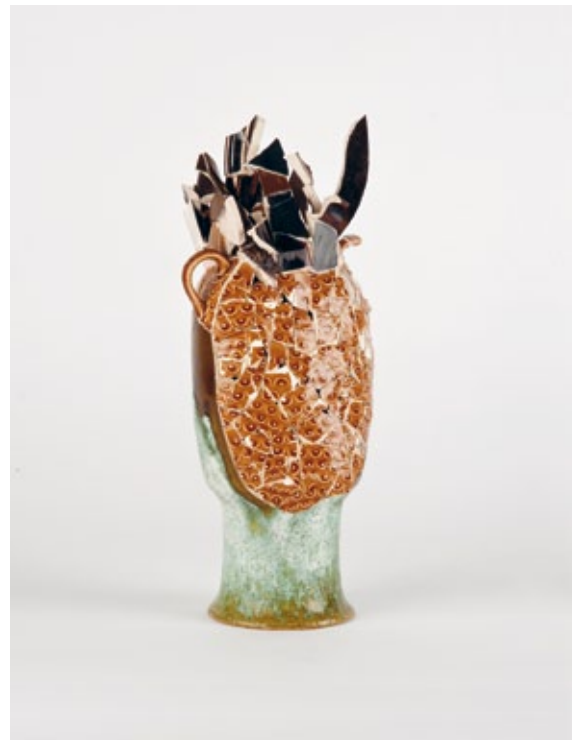
Helen Feifel

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Helen Feifel's objects and drawings create fine fissures within the direct perception of reality, they fathom the borders between presentation and representation. She places found, in part already existing materials and forms into new contexts. The features of the objects are questioned, or rather, newly defined. In an earlier presentation, for example, the costume of a harlequin on the wall, which at first glance seemed to have been hung there in passing, turns out to be an object-like picture when taking a closer look: the diamond-shaped pattern is painted, and depending on one's viewing position, the "costume" appears two-dimensional, while the back side is monochrome white. What is comprehensible becomes inexplicable, what is functional becomes unusable, like with her glass and vase objects that consist of vases of various styles that she shattered beforehand. As "re-collaged" objects, they turn into vivid masks of different social notions of taste and at the same time seem to be elements of archaic rituals and gestures. This process-oriented change or transformation is visualized in the gouaches by the joining together of tiny, finely drawn and coloured components that form protagonists, the appearance of which can be described as something between clothing, architecture and nature. The hand-coloured photograph in the current exhibition marks a special form of inversion and reversal of art-genre-specific features. The hand colouring of photographs is an almost forgotten technique. At the end of the 19th century, particularly in Japan, the colouring of photographs was an art form of its own, which became obsolete, however, with the invention of colour photography. The technique is very elaborate and time-consuming; special transparent dyes are used for this purpose which only very few companies still manufacture. In this regard, photography turns into painting. At the same time, the picture motif of the photograph is an object produced by Helen Feifel that appears to unite the features of her vase objects and gouaches to thus become the enigmatic main figure.

Biographical Notice:

Helen Feifel (*1983) lives and works in Karlsruhe. Between 2005 and 2011 she has studied at the academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. She has participated at group exhibitions like "Regionale" at Kunsthalle Basel, Städtischen Galerie Karlsruhe and Kunsthaus Baselland.



Untitled, 2011
found pottery
31 × 10 × 12 cm

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