

The Apparent Lightness of Katharina Schilling's Painting

In one of the most famous scenes in film history bright pieces of clothing, unidentifiable bits and fragments of furniture are flung through the sky of California's Death Valley. Newspapers, flowers, milk bottles and food hover in the blazing blue in seemingly endless slow motion. A house has exploded. This is set against the, at first, slow then screaming music of Pink Floyd, which eventually breaks off abruptly. *Zabriskie Point*.

The objects in Katharina Schilling's paintings definitely don't hover in space as a consequence of an explosion. Their intactness alone proves this. Shadowless, the fragile vases, erasers, fluffy sponges and yellow star fruit distinctly stand out from the pale, yet never shaky backgrounds, whose colors and structures speak more of their own independence than of the objects in their center. The basis for the concentrated composition comes from various objects found in museums, everyday life and popular culture. What first grabs one's attention is the unwillingness with which the objects let themselves be recognized as painted. One longs to touch everything, feel the smoothness and coolness of the material, bite into the fruit and taste it. Nothing seems further away than an imperative for decryption or the intent swiping of mobile phones. There are no shards, no cracks, there is no gravity – and yet it is a play on the act of recognition. The subjects' distance to their political dimensions is purposeful. What does this apparent lightness of being refer to?

The objects have been revoked from their original classification systems and “thrown” into a new context. Their arrangement within the image and the suspension of gravity bespeak by no means an affective but rather a self-reflective attitude. The fact that the objects in the paintings are rendered recognizable in a sensual and detailed fashion, directs the paintings’ spotlights determinedly on their own production processes: the act of seeing, of painting, of showing itself.

If today the world’s order systems are both being questioned and falling apart then what will show me how things are held together? The objects’ mis-en-scène in front of a seemingly decoupled background forms something not unlike a museum display within the paintings. One gets the impression that the unsentimental representation, the portrayed fragility and mysterious cohesion create a display that simultaneously preserves and needs to be overcome, literally “suspending”. The skin of the star fruit may be so smooth, the canvas stretched so taught, in the end all things shallow have a depth and vice versa. Or were the corners of the canvas ground down by life? It’s about saving in more than one sense.

Incorruptible self-reflection and staged mysteriousness are put to test within the pictorial space. Painting’s continuous oscillation between representation and abstraction allows for something to be simultaneously retained and dismissed. The apparent lightness of Katharina Schilling’s painting can be integrated within this *horror vacui* of the semiotic universe. The fear of emptiness asks: Must I dedicate myself to these appearances from a microscopic proximity, must I name names to understand, or can I recognize more in rough gestures from afar? More of what?

The paintings make clever use of the fact that the question “What is an object” complements the question “Who am I?”. Formal perfection hangs like a promise suspended in space, as does the desire for peace and beauty. It isn’t just its exaggerated accessibility that makes this belief a disposition. When peace becomes undeniable then its flip side also comes into play. The story of an unharmed life is in part the story of an explosion. To pick out certain objects of this world, to suspend, to keep them, without immediately tossing them out—we thus find ourselves uplifted in a world, where we, the young, so it is said, can no longer make it anywhere.

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