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Mingle Mime

Cornelia Baltes

1st September – 6th October 2018

Opening 31st August, 6 - 9 pm

You are being watched. Keep your cool. It is natural to feel uncomfortable when noticing eyes are following you. I suggest you walk slowly towards one corner of the room and keep your eyes directed to the ground. You do not want to attract too much attention. When in a comfortable position, lift up your head and carefully look at what fills the room, see what you are surrounded by and register familiar faces. You may feel compelled to get involved or you may prefer to slip into the role of an observer. Whichever position you choose, find your moment, define your territory and stay confident. Move from one person to another - mingle and mime!

'Mingle Mime' is the first solo show in Switzerland by Berlin-based artist Cornelia Baltes. The title's frisky alliteration may at first sound slightly clunky to native English speakers: hum the words, hear the hook. The verb "mingling" is used to describe the active engagement with others in social situations. Here, placed within a specific context and merged with the word 'mime', it automatically alludes to the culture of social get-togethers at art events. A theatre in the round.

Hung in the space is a suite of eight new paintings. They do not immediately reveal their faces upon entry. Perched in areas of the gallery, they are showing their backs, emphasising the three-dimensionality of each work. Navigating through the space, we find abstracted, multi-layered and immaculate surfaces. Paint is applied with precision and with the most economical of gestures. We grow a desire to read the elusive forms. We start to detect gazes. Viewed from the distance, the black marks on the canvases form into recognisable contours. Everything seems carefully arranged, but there is a constant play of hiding, disguising and revealing.

In this exhibition, Baltes explores the subject matter of head portraits and questions how we assign meaning to surfaces on a daily basis. Humans analyse facial expressions within 100 milliseconds. To better identify and remember people, the brain is trained to filter out main characteristic features. Baltes makes use of this deduction process on her canvases. Her visual signs are based

on the everyday. Baltes relies on her memory to render these forms by extracting the essence of the image with the use of highly graphic, choreographed marks. Each brushstroke is meticulously planned before being committed to canvas. A striking aesthetic remains: Monochrome marks and bold motifs fight for the viewer's attention, disrupted only by flawlessly gradating shades and occasional, colourful scribbles on the surface.

In line with the playful nature of Baltes practice, the exhibition also displays an architectural awareness as paint spills out like a physical score over the surfaces and on the surrounding walls, dominating the space. It evokes Baltes's previous distinct installations, which introduced the notion of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Her works have often been suspended from the ceiling or installed on wheels on the floor of the exhibition space, in order to be arranged by the audience. Individual paintings have been transformed into eery sculptures, with legs attached to them. Baltes artistic practice is ambiguous as works can take on different personas, whilst the audience is given the freedom to interact and perform within her compositions.

Carefully selected titles help characterise the elements within her work. It encourages the audience to instantly connect with what is being depicted. Here, Baltes has casted the works in the exhibition as actors by transforming their surrounding environment into a stage that the audience is invited to share with the works. Inherently, the exhibition becomes a gentle invitation to socialise.

'Mingle Mine' reflects the artist continued fascination with abstraction and representation. The works constantly shift between recognition and obscurity, the absurd and incongruous. The process by which images are evoked plays a pivotal role. Each of Baltes paintings offers a visual conundrum inviting the viewer to decipher through the combination of intuition and observation.

Katharina Worf, August 2018

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