

SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

Nina Pohl

New Paintings

09/11/12 - 12/01/13

Art history has assigned exactly two functions to photography in its relationship to painting. The first has been to take over the accurate representation of objects, landscapes, and persons and thereby to free painting for taking on the "higher tasks" (Wolfgang Kemp) which have been realized through the "-isms" since the end of the nineteenth century. The second has been to provide images which could be used by painters as models for their work and which, in the process of painting, underwent a transformation and revaluation into works of art.

Nina Pohl's *New Paintings* are photographic images which not only reverse this traditional relationship, but also reevaluate it in a pointed manner. It is painting which here provides the initial models, above all the painting of Art Informel or Abstraction as the scene of an ostentatious working on the picture: brushstrokes and layers of paint, contours and textures, pastose application and palimpsest-like markings, which Pohl completely or fragmentarily records and presents in significant enlargement. In this way, that which was abstract (and to some extent already large-formatted) — works by Franz Kline, Josef Albers, Joan Mitchell, et al. — is extended further in its two-dimensionality, rendered unbounded as an image, and thereby closely scrutinized, as if in this project the primary task of photography consisted of scanning the surfaces of paintings in order to register them in an inventory.

In many ways, this constellation is reminiscent of Antonioni's film *Blow Up* (UK 1966) which, in a sequence that has since become legendary, staged the process of an enlarging contemplation as a technique for the dissolving of representations into surfaces and as a transformation of motifs into markings. In the familiar, proto-criminological plot of *Blow Up*, there remains, after the enlargement of what was once a motif, not much more than points and patterns — a spectacle of another sort in which, above all, the materiality of the image is brought to light. With Antonioni, it is the materiality of the photographic image; with Pohl, it is the materiality of the painted image, which in the *New Paintings* comes to the fore scarcely less distinctly than in Pohl's *Ohne Titel* ("Untitled") from the years 2004 to 2006, pictures which transform a series of historical sea-pieces into landscapes of the second degree, complete with reliefs, gradations of color, and incidences of light through which the surface attains its own plasticity. (What is less well-known but relevant with respect to the *New Paintings* is the fact that one theme of *Blow Up* is also the competitive relationship between painting and photography, in strict accordance with the traditional rules which have always granted superior status to painting and devalued photography into a technical procedure for producing pictures. The painted image which is thereby juxtaposed with the pictures of the photographer is an ensemble of

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black and white strokes which bears striking resemblance to some of the models for the *New Paintings*.

But instead of simply creating enlarged reproductions of the pictorial segments, in Pohl's new series something is always added to the works of abstract painting, namely a consistently figural aspect, i. e. bodies (often of animals) and objects which appear in front of or between the lines and markings, are literally inserted into the picture, and obstruct the view onto the abstract scenario. By blocking it, they shift it from the register of the gaze feeling its way across the depicted surface into that of a projective view which transforms the two-dimensional arrangement into three-dimensionality and makes it possible to imagine a pictorial depth where previously there was none, which causes bodies to enter into spaces that otherwise would present themselves as flat surfaces.

The encounter between thorough abstraction and thorough objecthood, such as is initiated by Nina Pohl in the *New Paintings*, actually achieves a double effect. Arising along with the idea of the (new) spatial depth is also a notion of drama, an allusion which remains vaguely formulated yet has a sufficiently evocative impact. The colorful bird in front of the variegated surface of the picture: Has it dissolved or devastated this surface, is the bird absorbed by it or does it in fact emerge out of the surface? The tire in front of the wide, black lines: Will it erase or retrace these lines, did it cause them, or does it inscribe other markings into the picture? The "slaves" that are slowly dragging a tetragonal block toward the middle of *Quadrophenia*: Are they about to consolidate the pictorial structure, or will they contribute their part to the destruction of the existing composition of interconnected squares? In one way or another, this re-entry of objective elements into the abstract ensemble is characterized by an aspect of strife and potential destruction which maintains an uncertainty with regard to the consequences for the pictorial structure.

Viewed in this way, this series interweaves two principles which are generally considered to be irreconcilable. On the one hand, the copying mode, the technical reproduction, which presents itself as an inventory-taking of the (painted) surface. On the other hand, the addition, the intervention, by means of which the surface is brought into contact with a foreign body that in no way belongs to it. If one were inclined to summarize succinctly this highly individual technique of the appropriation of art-historical contents, then one could say that, in her *New Paintings*, Pohl leaves the pictorial surface untouched, and simultaneously occupies it anew in an intervention which has suspended its effects and, in an emphatically photographic manner, has established the state of no longer / not yet in perpetuity.

Stefanie Diekmann

Sprüth Magers Berlin will also be concurrently presenting the group exhibition *Malerei der 80er Jahre* curated by Albert Oehlen.

For further information and press enquiries please contact Silvia Baltshun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Opening reception: 08.11.2012, 6 - 9 pm
Hours: Tue - Sat, 11 am - 6 pm

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Nina Pohl

Biographie / Biography

Lebt und arbeitet / lives and works in Berlin, D

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Selected solo exhibitions

2012

'New Paintings', Sprüth Magers, Berlin, D

2008

Monika Sprüth Philomene Magers, Cologne, D
Stadtmuseum Münster, Münster, D

2007

Kunstverein Oldenburg, Oldenburg, D

2006

Kunstverein Heilbronn, Heilbronn, D

2005

Sprüth Magers Projekte, Munich, D

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Selected group exhibitions

2011

'Melanchotopia', Witte de With, Rotterdam, NL
'Animal Kingdom', Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, D

2009

'Zeigen', kuratiert von / curated by Karin Sander, Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin, D
'Listen to your eyes', Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, D

2008

'Looking back', Mireille Mosler Ltd, New York, USA
'Unter Sternen', Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf, CH

2007

'Foto.Kunst – Zeitgenössische Fotografie aus der Sammlung Essl',
Essl Museum – Kunst der Gegenwart, Klosterneuburg/Vienna, A

2005

'Heile Welt', Kupferstichkabinett Dresden, D

2004

'Die graue Kammer', Gallery Kerstin Engholm, Vienna, A

2003

'Große Kunstausstellung NRW', Museum Ehrenhof, Düsseldorf, D

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2003

'20th Anniversary Show', Monika Sprüth Philomene Magers, Cologne, D

2002

'Das letzte Tabu', kuratiert von / curated by Harald Szeemann, Expo.02, Schweizerische Landesausstellung, Neuchâtel, CH

'Heute bis jetzt. Zeitgenössische Fotografie aus Düsseldorf', Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, D

2001

'Trade. Waren, Wege und Werte im Welthandel heute', Fotomuseum Winterthur, CH

2000

'Das fünfte Element', Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, D

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Bibliographie / Bibliography

Bücher und Kataloge (Auswahl) / Selected books and catalogues

2011

'Melanchotopia', Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam.

2009

'Listen to your eyes: Werke aus der Sammlung Schmidt-Drenhaus', Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.

2007

'Unter Sternen – Aus der Sammlung Willy Michel. Fotografie', Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf.

2006

'Heile Welt – Werke aus der Sammlung Schmidt-Drenhaus', Kupferstich-Kabinett derstaatlichen Kunstsammlung Dresden, Bielefeld: Verlag Kerber.

2002

Szeemann, Harald: 'Geld und Wert – Das letzte Tabu', Luegete: Edition Oehrli.

2000

'Das fünfte Element – Kunst oder Geld', Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Ostfildern: DuMont Buchverlag.