

Christian Kölbl, Pia vom Ende

#krisekannauchgeilsein

curated by Wolfgang Ullrich

03.11.2022–03.11.2023

New Viewings is a virtual space, a space in-between the real and the unreal. It has no restrictions and allows for the realization of everything and anything. It provides a controlled environment, which allows for experimentation without the constraints of the physical realm. The exhibition series New Viewings was initiated during the pandemic, when cultural institutions and galleries were closed down. Barbara Thumm invited artists and curators to overcome these obstacles and make use of her virtual gallery. In that sense her gallery offered not only a digital platform for artists and their projects, but also protected surroundings for the development of new ideas in very uncomfortable times. Almost ironically, this site comes in the shape of an interior space, with a floor, walls and a roof as elementary components, assuming that this rendition of an architectural construction was sufficient for a virtual exhibition.

One of the best-known advertising slogans at the beginning of the 21st century was „Geiz ist geil“ („Stingy is horny“). The capitalist profit logic celebrated with it comes up in a different way in the title of the exhibition by Pia vom Ende and Christian Kölbl: „Krise kann auch geil sein“ („Crisis can also be horny“) – meaning that markets created by sudden changes offer the opportunity for wealth. The phrase comes from YouTuber and entrepreneur Fynn Kliemann, who thought it was horny to make a lot of money from the gigantic demand for masks created by Corona in April 2020. Just how reckless his supposedly social deals were was revealed two years later - whereupon the cynical confession of a crisis profiteer went viral and became a hashtag.

In the exhibition, the two artists present products that are themselves only made conceivable by current crises such as the war in Ukraine. At first glance, they thus seem to confirm another basic conviction of capitalism, which consists of interpreting entrepreneurs and artists as two varieties of the same type of person: Both, it is argued, are equally creative, risk-taking, and uncompromising.

But it quickly becomes clear that Pia vom Ende and Christian Kölbl undermine this popular analogy, which serves primarily to ennoble entrepreneurs as artists. The fact that they design and advertise particularly cynical offers also exposes the dark, even evil side of many quite sincerely intended products. With their exhibition, they sharpen the view of how often abysses open up just in times of crisis, when cohesion and altruism would be all the more important.

(Text: Wolfgang Ullrich)

Christian Kölbl

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Christian Kölbl, born 1994, lives in Berlin. Studied at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig with Michael Riedel and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main with Tobias Rehberger. Director of the space project „CK-Offspace“ and „Schönwalder Strasse 44“ and co-founder of the collectives „Tannhäuser Kreis“ and „Capitalist Surrealists“.

Design and marketing are the most important drivers in a developed affluent society. They ensure ever new offerings and variants, give products more distinctive power and legitimize higher prices. Even the most everyday types of products have been charged with meaning in recent decades by being transformed into brands and aesthetically exaggerated. Often, the utility value even takes a back seat to the aesthetic value. So sneakers, perfume or surfboards are now collected rather than used by many.

New crises, above all the war in Ukraine and feared blackouts in the energy supply, are now preparing the ground for making products attractive to broader markets for which there was previously no major marketing. Emergency generators, radios with battery operation, but even weapons are now suddenly being subjected to the same aesthetic upgrade.

Christian Kölbl goes one step further. He is offering a „Liberator“ gun in four design variants and as a limited edition, but above all with his own name on it. This is printed in large letters on the gun's case, turning it into a luxury product. The guns are produced with a 3D printer according to plans freely available on the Internet, not unlike many weapons that are nowadays used by preppers, right-wing extremists and other fanatics, bypassing all laws. So in Kölbl's case, these highly controversial weapons are now certified with the aura of art, which makes them all the more sinister. For does this not transfigure the aggressive catastrophic longing of those who otherwise use them into a heroic worldview and prophecy? But it is not only those who enjoy frivolity who are likely to be addressed by this; rather, Kölbl's multiples also allow us to think in terms of large historical arcs and to associate Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, who for their part designed weapons and fortifications.

The walls of the exhibition space read „Buy your gun.“ The suggestion is that in the future everyone will need a gun - that this is part of a contemporary, even decent lifestyle. And once weapons are just as much a matter of fashions and hypes as music, clothing and accessories, then new markets will open up all the time, and highly dynamic consumer cycles will emerge here as well. Christian Kölbl's work makes us aware that in the course of marketable staging, even war and violence - the business of killing - are no longer something remote and questionable. Rather, what is aestheticized is also normalized.

(Text: Wolfgang Ullrich)

Pia vom Ende

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Pia vom Ende, born 1990, lives in Berlin. Studied at the Burg Giebichenstein Academy of Art Halle/S. and the Berlin Weißensee Academy of Art; 2021 master student of Tilo Baumgärtel. Founder of the project space Schönwalder Straße 44 in Berlin.

Since Corona, ‚social distancing‘ has been the order of the day. This has created numerous new markets; the manufacturers of plexiglass panes, the providers of on-line conferencing tools and many others are benefiting in a big way. But the energy crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, which causes many to fear the most dramatic winter since the end of World War II, abruptly changes priorities. Now it’s a matter of generating heat by every conceivable means. And any kind of closeness seems more promising than distance.

In the exhibition, Pia vom Ende presents a business idea that takes the desire for closeness to the extreme. She offers human warmth dispensers that can be ordered online like a cleaning service or a call girl. Maybe someone just wants to warm their cold feet, or maybe they finally want to sweat properly. Then people with a fever are even particularly attractive warmth donors. In any case, the artist envisions a broadly diversified product range. The variety of bodies becomes a marketing advantage, as the offer under the name „How to survive without electricity“ can be presented as suitable for all kinds of needs.

Pia vom Ende deliberately leaves it unclear exactly who the service providers are. On smartphone displays, they are only depicted in schematized form, namely as emojis, whose cute design is, however, in turn capable of generating emotional warmth. However, the cheerful appearance of the displays also obscures the assumptions on which this business idea is based and what it implies. In fact, it involves a double imposition: Those who need money and therefore have to donate warmth cannot choose whose proximity they get, and those who are cold and know no other way to get warmth have to reckon with the fact that the warmth donor may smell bad, be abusive or infectious.

But since Pia vom Ende presents the displays in the form of painted pictures, it remains open whether this business idea is really designed to be implemented. Perhaps it remains a dystopian artist’s fantasy that explores how far people would go in a crisis situation, indeed what degradations they would accept. The fact that there are large packages in the exhibition space, however, suggests that the idea is meant quite seriously. Shouldn’t they contain the ordered human warmth dispensers packed for shipment? But doesn’t this make them a commodity once and for all? Will unboxing videos be circulating online next winter, showing customers curiously unpacking their warmers?

(Text: Wolfgang Ullrich)