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**Helen Marten**

*Orchids, or a hemispherical bottom*

18 September - 1 November 2014

Opening: 17 September 2014, 6 - 9 pm

Johann König, Berlin is pleased to present Helen Marten's room-sized installation *Orchids, or a Hemispherical Bottom* for the first time in Germany after it had been created for the 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2013.

*Orchids*,... centers on an animated video in which Marten sets forth a sanitised and alluring world of free-floating and fragmentary objects. Excised from normal context and imbued with an impossible cosmetic sheen, these crystalline forms are conjured in colours that range from the surreally heightened to the deliberately banal. A line of toy-like objects - a train, a giraffe on wheels, a boat - trundles along on an impossibly turquoise plane. Parasitically followed by a swirling black fly, the unfolding narrative is one of production, consumption and saturation. Elsewhere, the naked human backside of the title (cropped and anonymous) is shown with a luridly-glowing orchid tucked between its buttocks. At points, the imagery takes on the semblance of a painting or diagram, both formulaic 'analogues' of reality, like the video itself, implying the knotty weight of a Cézanne still life.

We have entered a space of making where the fabric of known things has changed, precisely because the fabric of *reality* has changed. We have trepidation of easily nameable parts, because they are pre-loaded with communication; they serve as short hand emblems for ideas that we know have form, so assume to have content. Outlines speak of certainty, but also the flurry of partial destruction. Hand drawn or digital, the line that seeks to enclose or define can also waver. Dimensionally intelligent, skins are of one surface and one plane: Known things are separated into temporary pieces and every figure in space is defined precisely through intersection by a plane of material, by outline or by some corresponding figure of another dimension.

As the "or" of its title suggests, Marten's video asserts the sheer proliferation and interchangeability of images, emblems and pictograms in the physical and intangible realms alike (an idea that is reflected in the voiceover: "You tell an octopus: be an elephant, and the octopus becomes an elephant"). The 'hemispherical bottom' is an illusionistic wireframe conceit - hemispherical as a mask. Like all objects, it is a simple vector of meaning that can be skewed or mutated. The voiceover to the film takes us on a surreal journey in which richly evocative images

("exquisite leftovers of mayonnaise ... a chubby weave of lace") mass together into a heady melange of resonances. Reality appears to have been garbled, its usual taxonomies and categories teased apart. The result is a peculiarly sensual kind of catastrophe. Different registers of speech similarly collide in the voiceover - intimate diaristic revelations or idle chitchat give way to poetic flights of fancy. These contrasting 'footings' slyly subvert each other's meanings or imports, ultimately throwing a light on the rigid formulae, which govern speech and dialogue in any given situation.

The video is installed in a room that has been hermetically sealed off and softened by a thick beige carpet, and is accompanied by sculptural satellites that suggest 'outtakes' from the film. The video's serene, and ambiguously defined 'nowhere realm' thus extends physically into the room. The sculptures' assortments of *recherché* and motley materials (Formica, carved walnut, maple, inlaid wood knots, alabaster fruit etc.) serve as analogies to the video's intricate amalgam of eclectic forms and connotations. The sculptures moreover approximate recognisable items while refusing to satisfy our preconceptions of those items (a woven laundry basket filled with rolled-up socks also incongruously contains a lettuce leaf and pieces of decaying fruit - the inevitable corollary, perhaps, of the over-ripe and painterly fruit which appears in the video). A wooden, chest-like object is both civic and miniaturized, an art historical reference but also an incongruously weighty domestic model.

Seductive in the same way as a processed or packaged veneer (and with the same compressed dishonesty) this work - in both its video and plastic forms - brings urban and emotional signs into friction, alternating between optical diagram and manual catastrophe.

Helen Marten (born 1985, Macclesfield) lives and works in London. Her first institutional show *Parrot Problems* is currently on view at the Fridericianum, Kassel. Recent solo exhibitions were held at Sadie Coles HQ, London (2014); CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson (NY), USA (2013); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland; Major group exhibitions include *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace)*, 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013); 12th Lyon Biennale, Lyon (2013); *New pictures of common objects*, MoMA PS1, New York (2012); and *The New Public*, Museion, Bolzano (2012). Marten received the Lafayette Prize in 2011 and the LUMA Award in 2012.