

The term 'season', from the old French *seson*, meaning 'sowing', once exclusively referred to the annual changes in nature – the wax and wane of temperature and daylight, and the regulation of these cycles by agriculture. It is in essence, then, an economic term, where very public displays of nature are harnessed by private business. Since the 17th century, it has also referred to the British aristocracy's social calendar – still inherently economic in its parading of women of ripe age for matchmaking. Today, seasons are more commonly television and fashion-oriented, PR moments of new culture harvested for consumption.

Markus Amm and Nicole Wermers' work isn't on first appearance the most obvious pairing. Once converging through shared interests in modernism, photography and collage, their work has since advanced in different directions: Amm pursuing an intensity of painting so abstracted it teeters on the edge of sculpture; Wermers developing a conceptual language to question the aesthetics of urban environments and gendered design. Yet a seasonal rhythm – of friendship and its cyclical celebrations of subjective moods, of the continued negotiation of volume, of the need (personally, emotionally, economically) to produce – knits them together.

Wermers' use of sand and soil in her new works entitled *Seasons* is a gesture towards the building site. A symbol of gentrification, the construction site represents the literal economic sculpting of landscape – a constant tussle with raw volume, positive space carved out as negative, negotiated back into positive. Wermers' soil mixture hovers between sculptural object and decorative frame, encasing images of Parisian outdoor bistro tables. The photographs' outlines are based on architectural floorplans, but also associate cut-out food packaging windows allowing the consumer to see a glimpse of the product – salmon, muesli, salad. It's almost sexual, a flirtatious lifting of the skirts.

Gentrification's intrinsic masculinity is often subtly reworked or feminised by Wermers. Her *Moodboards* are adapted readymades – foldable baby changing units usually found in public bathrooms which provide horizontal work surfaces to perform an intimate ritual. While the changing units' smooth plastic, rounded corners and belts meet today's hygiene and safety standard, the irregularly patterned terrazzo, cast into them by the artist, is popular for public flooring due to its disguising of dirt. Floor has been raised to the level of display, collapsing architectural hierarchies as well as historical and contemporary features of public space.

Wermers is interested in this in-between: the café table stationed along the frontier between inside and outside, between public and private, between small, orderly luxury and the hurtling chaos of the city street. Café culture as a placeholder for urban leisure is a recurring theme in her work; an earlier series, *Croissants & Architecture*, paired images of the now-ubiquitous pastries with sheets of sandpaper, a gradual erosion of precise layers of lamination. While nodding to histories of *flâneurs* and, more recently, *flâneuses*, Émile Zola's modern department store supplanting traditional small workshops, and Walter Benjamin's errant writings – it is not in fact hugely important that the café photographs are of Paris. What the images represent – the freedom and status to sit and observe – carries far more affect than the aesthetics of the image itself; there are today countless imitations along any British high street.

The aesthetics of image are at the forefront of Amm's paintings. Made by carefully layering thin layers of oil paint, pigment and binding agents over and over, the end results are a measure of a behaviour, of a kind of science at work between colours and chemicals. The paintings are at once amorphous and precise – approaching sculpture in their depth and fragility. Like Wermers' building sites, they are in constant negotiation with their own sense of space and substance, almost impossibly flat surfaces oozing profound optical depth. Amm's early photographic work is present here, with some works taking on the effect of an overexposed polaroid, or an infrared camera. The painting process is a similar harvesting of light, which inevitably spills over into crusty edges that cannot be contained or mastered. These objects are also windows: revealing something not quite visible, but more sedimentary, geological, alchemical. So much activity now takes place through similarly-shaped interfaces; it is difficult in Amm's gestural swipes to not conjure an image of a tablet or iPhone, infinite potential behind greasy fingerprints. For Amm, these imperfections act as interventions, revealing the palimpsest sown just beneath the surface.

Wermers' *Bike Rack* sculpture, first displayed in her survey exhibition *Women Between Buildings* at Kunstverein in Hamburg earlier this year, is shown here more sparse, less laden with bicycles. Beneath its functional surface, the sculptural underbelly of the structure is clearly revealed here – in fact, the vehicles almost become ornamental decoration on top. Removed from its urban context and brought inside, transit has been rendered stationary; it sits stubbornly as a blockage in opposition to the city's persistent mobility. A public gesture of generosity, of security, is laid claim to by privately owned objects – a collective action of sculpting space that continues from one season to the next.

Text by Phoebe Cripps.