
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Straight Flush

Silke Albrecht, Koen van den Broek, Cody Choi, Martin Gerwers, Nic Hess, Markus Huemer, Jonas Maas, Anna Malagrida, Christof Mascher, Yelena Popova, Arcangelo Sassolino, Florian Schmidt, Corinna Schnitt, Javier Téllez, Rebecca Ann Tess, Ignacio Uriarte, Bas de Wit
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After 17 years in Aachener Straße, we have moved to Gertrudenstraße 24-26 in 50667 Cologne, starting a new chapter for our gallery. For this occasion, we are bringing together for the first time in one exhibition all the artists we represent and who work in different media – painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video and installation. The works of some of the artists are influenced by political and sociological themes. Other artists' work reflects the conditions and definitions of their art and the media they use. In *Straight Flush*, these two approaches, which guide our gallery program and which, of course, overlap, can be experienced in equal measure.

Crucial to the works of **Silke Albrecht** (*1986 in Soest, lives and works in Düsseldorf) is a preoccupation with painterly processes and diverse techniques, with pictorial, representational and signifying functions within the framework of painting – be it figurative or abstract. Her works are not simply forms and colors painted with a brush on canvas. Rather, Albrecht also works with means of collage, assemblage, sewing and embroidery, among others. She pours, she wipes, and she draws on the canvas, bringing herself into the process of image creation not so much as a distanced performer, but rather as an actor. Through her embroideries, Albrecht regularly integrates figurative representations into her abstract works that refer to content that played a role for her at the particular moment the works were created. These figurative representations and the autobiographical processing can also be found in her ink drawings.

As a starting point for his paintings **Koen van den Broek** (*1973 in Bree, Belgium, lives and works in Antwerp) frequently uses photographs of country and city views, whose composition he transfers basically unchanged into the painting. With curbs, street corners, or details zoomed in extremely close, the artist deliberately chooses inconsequential places as the subject of his works. By allowing hardly any narrative elements, van den Broek directs the viewer's gaze to the painterly aspects of his works – the choice of color, the brushstroke, the painted space versus the flatness of the canvas, and the composition, which, due to its genesis, related to a specific moment and was significantly influenced by the photographic perspective. The title of the work *Blinds #6* refers to the blinds of a motel in the USA, through which van den Broek had photographed a building opposite. Only the reference through the title of the picture, lets the viewer recognize what is depicted – but then clearly and distinctly. This play with the relationship between figuration and abstraction is typical for the artist. Many of his works seem like abstract paintings, but they are almost always direct images of his photographic originals, which are themselves images of reality. The same applies to the work *Water #1*, here van den Broek captures the view into a puddle reflecting the blue sky with clouds and a street lamp.

In his paintings, sculptures and installations, **Cody Choi** (*1961 in Seoul, lives and works in Seoul) focuses on the conflicts between different cultures and cultural hybrids of our age, as well as the resulting, constantly (re)producing social phenomena. This interest is explained by his biography. Born and raised in South Korea, Choi was forced to leave his homeland with his family in his early 20s for political reasons, and as a young adult found himself in a U.S. that he experienced as a place of chaos and frustration in the face of cultural differences. Ten years later, Choi returned to a much-changed South Korea, where he is viewed as an "American" and realizes that he does not feel fully at home in either culture. The works from the *Noblesse Hybridige* series express Choi's cultural as well as aesthetic hybridization. He mixes foliage from European Rococo paintings with nature motifs from the traditional Korean Sagunja style. On the production level, he also uses techniques from different origins: Western digital technologies, printing techniques, and oil painting on the one hand, and traditional Korean sagunja painting on the other.

Martin Gerwer's (*1963, lives and works in Düsseldorf) works move in the field of tension between painting, sculpture and relief. With them he examines, in short, the relationship between color and space. In their multi-

visuality, the expansive sculptures can only be fully experienced by the viewer when he actively walks around the multi-colored objects. Depending on the viewer's point of view, this results in a multitude of visual impressions. While works directly related to spaces play an interplay between perception of the sculpture and perception of the viewer in space, the artist's works show us how little we can rely on recognizing or even defining an appearance in an instant. Each movement of the viewer around such an object leads inevitably and with great surprise effects to sometimes total changes in appearance.

Nic Hess (*1968, lives in Zurich) became known since the late 1990s for installations in which he used industrial paint, collaged images and colored tapes, light projections and neon to take mental and factual possession not only of walls and ceilings, but of entire rooms. These (spatial) collages are based on an archive of hundreds of transparencies with the most diverse commercial logos, pictograms, images of masterpieces of art history, and political as well as economic icons. Hess plays music from a global, pictorial score. His notation is archived images that he has collected over the past 25 years. Images that seem arbitrary and meaningful at the same time. Images we don't know and yet know because we all live with an inner archive of once-seen icons, symbols, logos, emblems, and emoticons in a world where linguistic communication is supplanted by a visual language. Hess stages this universal archive of images into a rhythm of emptiness and compression. The works are the moments in the course of the melody in which the simple black line – the beginning of each drawing – condenses in the aggregation of pictorial information and takes on meanings that are beyond the known reading of the signs.

Markus Huemer works with the media of painting and drawing as well as creating interactive installations, environments or computer animations. In the paintings of this exhibition he seemingly depicts plants – specifically hop plants. We write “seemingly” because in fact the plants do not grow like that. Their images are based on digital collages of pictures of such hop plants, which Huemer found on the Internet and processed into new compositions. He thus plays a game of suggested depictive function, which he assumes of painting, and the subversion of this depictive function. Art-historically preconceived viewers see parallels to Raphael Sanzio's grotesques in the Vatican in the garlands in which he has laid the hop plants across the canvas. Here, too, decorative representations of plants that are certainly not illustrations. Along with this go titles that are absurd, illogical, and oblique and have no relation to what is (apparently) depicted. These titles underline the non-existent function of the work as a tool for depicting reality.

While the classical idea of painting is defined by the manual application of liquid color on a mostly rectangularly delimited surface, **Jonas Maas** (*1985 in Trier, lives in Düsseldorf) radically expands the spectrum of possibilities of what can be subsumed under the term “painting”. He deconstructs the traditional relationship between image carrier and image, between flat painting ground and color material, by letting carrier, color and forms act as equal elements of an image of painting – as systemic fragmentation and fragmentary systematization at the same time. Maas relies on unconventional techniques in his works: for example, he works on wood and aluminum, not on canvas. He often prints compositions on his painting surfaces using the UV printing process, which were created in image processing programs on the computer; otherwise, apart from the classic brush, he applies the paint with a roller or palette knife. Maas uses the means of schematization and disruption, of visual overload and minimalist reduction, concrete relationships and diffuse interstices or voids to investigate the conditions and possibilities of specifically colored structures in space.

Anna Malagrida's (*1970 in Barcelona, lives and works in Paris) works (videos and especially photographs) are characterized by her great interest in social and political contexts. She combines formal quality, media-conceptual considerations, and art-historical references with a great empathy for people. In her photographs, Malagrida thus deals with questions of cultural identity, the boundaries between the private and the public, and the relationships of authority and power in our contemporary society. Her works are often prompted by current events, but discuss issues that transcend the daily news. The work *Rue Balard II* comes from the series *Vitrines (Escaparates)*, which was created in 2008–2010 in the wake of the financial crisis that led to the closure of stores around the world. The subject of the works are the shop windows of closed Parisian stores, painted white to prevent a view of the empty interior. Malagrida photographed these shop windows, capturing the traces of the coats of paint as well as reflections of the city. The tensions of the city are embodied in these large-scale images (the photographs are reproduced almost to their original scale) in the form of an abstraction.

Christof Mascher (*1979 in Hannover, lives and works in Braunschweig) only seemingly follows the traditional path of narrative painting. It is true that his dream-like paintings conjure up fantastic narratives and combine a language of expressionist signs with illustrative details, contemporary iconography, and foreboding architectural

spaces. It is also the case that the works exhibit relationships to “primitive“ and “naïve“ art, to the fantastical hybrids of Paul Klee and Hieronymus Bosch, or to Emil Nolde’s expressive use of color. Mascher thus creates scenes of eerie, barren, and ambiguous spaces animated by fantastic flora and fauna and ethereal structures. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Mascher always records his narratives in the mode of “as if“. There are allusions to the history of mankind and / or the world: crocodiles, monuments, architectures, vehicles, historical-looking figures and others are elements that populate his images. And through the way in which he distributes these elements in his pictorial space and on the picture surface – the term of *pasticcio*, ^which comes from music, suggests itself – he develops a story (and subverts it at the same time), thus becoming a storyteller. But while he offers us this content, which one thinks one can understand, he simultaneously preserves openness. There is no clearly readable “story line“; whatever one sees remains broken, remains allusion and association.

Yelena Popova’s (*1978 in Ozersk, USSR, lives and works in Nottingham) work is always concerned with socio-political content, which she casts into artistic form after extensive research into the historical background and contexts. Accordingly, she works with a wide variety of media: video films, sculptures, installations, computer performances, drawings and tapestries. All groups of works are also accompanied by paintings, which have their own particular connection to the overarching themes, although – as it appears at first glance – they are abstract works formally related to Russian Modernism and Constructivism. Popova’s approach to her works is not so much documentary; rather, she seeks an aesthetically compelling form to confront us with the themes and stimulate reflection.

Arcangelo Sassolino (*1967 in Vicenza, where he lives and works) creates sculptures with which he makes reduced processes and physical phenomena such as speed, pressure, gravity, friction and controlled danger visible and tangible. Sassolino exposes his materials to direct and immediate force. Force thus acquires an artistically transformed perceptibility (in ancient Greek: *aisthesis*) as a physical quantity. Thus his works function as new solutions for sculpture. Sassolino’s handling of materials and forms is a metaphorical mirror for political-social relations.

Florian Schmidt (*1980 in Raabs, Austria, lives and works in Berlin and Weimar) creates pictorial bodies with which he explores the relationship between space, material and color. The results of this research are two-, sometimes three-dimensional wall works and free-standing sculptures. His pictorial structure is often related to the empty frame within which individual wooden slats form supporting structures on which flatter elements may be attached. Schmidt uses these individual elements on an equal footing and without deriving a hierarchy from their original function. In fact, Schmidt goes even further. Not only does he use the various materials without considering their original function, but he attempts to derive the design of the works from the materials themselves, in that he is guided in the composition of his works by the forms of the materials and colors already present. Thus, Schmidt’s working method reveals itself as a process of cyclical deepening of thoughts; as a cycle in which existing works enter into renewed connection with the dynamics of the working process, for which the factor of repetition turns out to be decisive.

Corinna Schnitt’s (*1964 in Duisburg, lives in Dortmund) work is characterized by her great interest in people and their interrelationships, loneliness or community, and the possible hopes and dreams that people have just as they suffer fates. Her films have an unagitated, peculiarly laconic character, which on the one hand makes us as viewers laugh, and on the other hand can make us melancholy. In the video work *Schönen, guten Tag (Hello Ms. Schnitt)*, we follow in black-and-white images a female tenant – played by Schnitt herself – who repeatedly receives instructions from the landlord couple via an answering machine and carries them out meticulously and compulsively. An imaginary threat from outside is suggested by the calls, which express distrust and anxiety. The protagonist’s striped clothing points to her status as an “inmate“ or convict and underscores the tenant’s isolation. The *Family Pictures* show constellations and stagings of groups of people that we, even without knowing the title, classify as classic family pictures. Individually, the pictures are authentic, appearing very normal and average. Only when we look more closely do we see that one person (the artist) is in each photo and always takes on a new role in the “families“ – as mother, daughter, sister and partner of different men. The photographs lose their authenticity, and so Schnitt dispels the notion that family pictures really say anything about the actual relationships of the people.

Javier Téllez (*1969 in Valencia, Venezuela, lives and works in New York) grew up as the son of two psychotherapists on the grounds of a clinic for mentally ill people and thus in a very special environment. His films not only very often deal with the history of film or theater, but they regularly question what is stereotypically understood by mental illness. The question, then, of what normality is and how to define “normal“ and especially “un-normal“ is what drives Téllez. In the 2006 film *Oedipus Marshal*, Téllez used mentally ill people as actors and staged Sophocles’ classic play, *Oedipus the King*, as a western film. As is customary in classical tragedies, the actors wear masks,

in this case Japanese. The offer for reflection includes not only the elements of Greek tragedy, but also the question of the (mental) state of the actors, their illness, which is not readily visible externally even without a mask, and the social definition of the abnormal in general. The film project resulted in 8 photographic diptychs (of which we show four), which show the actors in their costumes, each with and without a mask.

Rebecca Ann Tess (*1980 in Annweiler am Trifels, lives in Berlin) work has been circling around themes such as architecture, urban planning, landscape and how we as humans relate to each other and to nature by way of photography and video installation for several years. The question of who exercises what power over whom and how this manifests itself in our cities and also in our nature goes hand in hand with this. This is only an apparent departure from the themes that have occupied Tess thus far: namely, the examination of film and television history from the particular perspective of interest in gender topoi. For these were also investigations of relations of power and oppression. For the project »2Dbody3Dcode«, Tess was on the road in a camper van in different regions of Spain, focusing on the direct experience of nature through her own body. This resulted in photographs in which the artist focuses on specific geometric shapes in nature and explores the connections between patterns in nature and computer-generated algorithms

Ignacio Uriarte (*1972 in Krefeld, lives in Berlin) has become known for works for which he uses utensils from the banal world of daily office life. By repeating casual gestures and decontextualizing the materials he uses, he creates works that relate to the Minimal Art and Conceptual Art of the 1960s and 70s in form and content. The starting point for the works in our exhibition is doodling - an act that some people do absentmindedly on their notepad at work during a phone call or meeting. Uriarte uses this action as a technique for his works, forming geometric shapes. The banality of the executed action contrasts with the rational look, the arbitrariness of the individual lines through the scribbling contradicts the precisely arranged, structured forms.

Through the work of **Bas de Wit** (*1977 in Budel, lives and works in Maastricht) a peculiar world unfolds. De Wit's world is one without logic and reason; a clownish commentary on the (art) world and a reflection on the indeterminacy of life itself. Life, according to the artist, must be lived, not rationalized. For the sculptures in our exhibition, de Wit has worked with casts of ancient sculptures and in turn altered them: distorted, stretched, compressed, colored. The result are *the funny memories of...*, distorted images of works of art that actually stand for perfection and flawlessness, but are now marked by decay and grotesqueness.