
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Enya Burger

Welcome to the Club

November 7 – December 2024, 2024

Opening on November 6, 2024, 7–9 pm

Welcome to the Club is our first exhibition with Enya Burger. Burger (*1996, lives and works in Düsseldorf) graduated from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the summer of 2024 in the class of Prof. Gregor Schneider. She previously studied with Prof. Marcel Odenbach, who awarded her the title “Meister” in 2021.

In her work, Enya Burger deals intensely with power structures in politics, economy and digitality. In her visual language, she alienates insignia of power and thus brings complex issues to a visual point in a critical and analytical way. She also analyzes the structures underlying the production of digital technologies, which are often perceived as neutral and “genderless”. Burger works in an interdisciplinary way with installations, video, photography and (digital) drawing.

In the first room of the exhibition, visitors are greeted with the words “Welcome to the Club”, formed by an electric pasture fence stretched along the wall, which extends almost over the entire height of the room. The inviting sentence stands in stark contrast to the material used and its inherent danger of electrocuting careless visitors to the exhibition. The quote from Bruno Latour’s book *The Terrestrial Manifesto* refers to the social and ecological tensions of our time: in the age of climate change, the boundaries of what “belonging” to a territory means are shifting. The seemingly inviting “Welcome” contains a sharp irony: a club is exclusive and excludes outsiders – that is the nature of a club. The work thus becomes a commentary on ambivalent hospitality and the fear of losing one’s own space in an increasingly globalized and ecologically polluted world. “Welcome” applies not to everyone and certainly not to everyone in the same way.

Spirals cast in aluminum and polished to a high-gloss finish screw themselves into the walls of the gallery: with the title of the installation *Drill Baby Drill*, Burger takes up a provocative slogan of the US Republican Party, which stands for the ruthless practices of fracking. The slogan “Drill Baby Drill” is symbolic of the exploitation of the earth, in which every drop of resources is to be extracted – a symbol of the power that humans assume over nature. Burger extends the power motif beyond the depiction of drills by combining it with another ambiguous symbol: the suit belt, which embodies the dominance of the (usually male) decision-maker. Moreover, Burger also plays with the ambiguity of the belt as an instrument of punishment and as a suggestion for sexual acts. The polished material with its attractive aesthetics and the creation of a product, that can be capitalized on, thus contradict the critical examination of patriarchal structures inherent in the works.

Another of Burger’s works in the first room of the gallery, *Top Dog*, continues her exploration of power and hierarchy – and the associated exclusion from a peer group in which only a few are welcomed. To this end, she stretches navy and royal blue suit fabric, into which she has ironed sharp creases, onto canvases. The suit fabric, which is also a symbol of authority, of belonging to certain “clubs” and of the containment of individuality, conveys the disciplined façade of a male-dominated hierarchy. This visual staging is complemented by sprayed male perfume, which triggers olfactory experiences. The title *Top Dog*, inspired by Urs Widmer’s play of the same name, picks up on the ambiguous role of the “Topdog” as both a dominant figure and a submissive “dog”. Burger thus creates a field of tension between the exercise of power and submission.

Burger’s video installation *The World As A Phantom* won the 78th Internationale Bergischer Kunstpreis this year and we are showing it in the second room of the exhibition. The cross-genre film project sheds light on the authority emanating from technology and how it can shape social values and norms. In her work Burger creates the image of a dystopian reality in which the rejection of the use of technology is considered socially unacceptable and even forbidden. At the same time, Burger questions the boundaries between reality and fiction in digital technologies. By merging documentary elements with (scientific) fiction and integrating AI-generated

content, *The World As A Phantom* invites the viewer to critically examine contemporary social issues and the changing relationship between technology and human perception.

The installation *Wer dies nicht kann, kriegt keinen Mann* (“If you can’t do this, you can’t get a husband”) in the last room addresses the complex interactions between technology and gender roles. A drawing robot, attached to a blue children’s table, continuously draws the “Haus vom Nikolaus (House of St. Nicholas)” on a sheet of paper with wax crayons. The title-giving alternative to the Santa Claus rhyme illustrates how certain demands on the female gender are already anchored in early childhood. The installation also shows how corresponding stereotypical coding (usually or predominantly by men) is (or can be) inscribed in digital instruments, so that existing discrimination is culturally perpetuated, despite the changes in technology.

The self-portrait in the bathroom alludes precisely to such requirements and also to what is conceptually defined as “male gaze”. It shows Enya Burger sitting in her bathroom, bleaching her hair blonde and thus overwriting the existing “material”, her natural hair color. The pose she assumes is reminiscent of scenes from films from the 1950s and 1960s in which women were portrayed as the “weaker sex”. But it is precisely this role, which was ascribed to women in advertising with infamous phrases such as “what do I wear today, what do I cook for my husband”, that Enya Burger naturally does not take on, rather she ironizes or breaks it.

The three *T-Pose*-drawings show a digital, heavily exaggerated female figure from different perspectives, but always from below. The figures are drawn in the style of a mesh model, which is used for the digital 3D representation of objects and is used in the programming of computer games, among other things. In this context, female bodies are often highly sexualized and unrealistically shaped so that they would not be viable in analogue life, for example due to a waist that is too narrow and offers no space for organs. Burger draws the mesh figures on mousepads with a lacquer pencil; they stand for the digital availability of the female body and for its male-dominated construction, which – figuratively speaking – is reflected in the graph paper on which the mousepad is applied.

Just as Burger does not approve of this view, she does not limit “womanhood” to being a container. However, this is what the conventional terminology of electronics suggests, where “female” and “male” are used for the protruding center conductor or – as its counterpart – the sleeve around it. The four sockets, which Burger has titled *Four Female Nudes* and installed in a square in an object frame, thus serve to critically reflect not only on terminology, but also on traditional notions of femininity.

In *Welcome to the Club*, we are showing a whole cosmos of very different-looking objects created by Burger. They all stand for a conscious and critical-analytical attitude and view of the world and for an examination of technological developments that are not neutral, but are shaped by the values and perspectives of those who program them. Burger asks which social and gender-specific norms flow into the programming of technologies? And how these norms in turn influence the (digital) end products that are used in our everyday lives? Her works are far removed from readymades. Instead, the elevation of content through the aesthetic alienation of everyday objects is inscribed in all the works.

If you have any further questions or would like to receive images, please contact the gallery.