

Press release | Hungry Mice & Salty Pepper

March 4- April 1, 2017

Isabella Fürnkäs' first solo exhibition at Galerie Clages evokes rapture and a loss of control. Already from outside the exhibition, oversized eyes direct one's gaze toward four life-size figures, which are more than simply physical counterparts. On the contrary, they accumulate in the space and almost oppress the visitor with their drawn-on sensory organs, which grow in place of their faces and expand throughout the room. With their oversized teeth, ears, and tongues, they formally draw attention to the different avenues of sensory perception and seem to do so at an unabashed volume.

Billowing fabrics and garments draped over the mannequins stand in contrast to the flat drawings. If we were to read them one-dimensionally, they'd recall Fürnkäs' earlier installations. In those works, she would overlap visual fragments in the style of a collage, which enabled a sort of intrusive desire for still images as points of orientation in the flood of images produced by our temporally, spatially, and visually complex world. Among the garments, one scans two kimonos, which could signal a biographical reference to Fürnkäs' childhood in Japan but also allow space for a feeling of distance and foreignness.

This drifting moment of being-thrown-off and the search for a calm point makes one's eyes wander further through the space. Droplets drawn on the gallery's walls guide one's flowing gaze. The droplets, which inevitably conjure associations with tears, are a recurring motif in Fürnkäs' work. They subtly work through the contradiction of water's neutrality as an element and its natural fluidity in the form of tears and sweat, evoking the type of physical sensations and emotions that evade our control. There is something liberating in this ineluctable movement—no in-between state, nothing asked or sought-after. It seems that the overextended limbs of the figures reach, too, for that sort of autonomy.

Two heads display a very direct form of body language in the second room, where thought and conscious expression have also been eliminated. A force of emotive physicality emerges alongside all of the gentleness in Fürnkäs' drawings, at once certain and delicate. This attitude-turned-gesture manifests itself throughout the twenty drawings in the gallery's end-room. Even though the forms and doodles speak to emotions and confusions, they also contain a certain levity and openness.

Waiting at the end of the exhibition space, there is a wall installation in which fabric has been similarly draped into small nests. Antenna-like rods of metal protrude from the wall in the viewer's direction. The soft and malleable properties of the fabric form a strong contrast to the metal's cold hardness. One almost feels as though one is witnessing the growth of a protective layer. On the floor, Fürnkäs takes up the most pared down, almost archetypal method of creating form—a material known as "kinetic sand" becomes the carrier of expressions encoded in body language. A screen almost entirely obscured in sand displays a chemical process, sparking associations with fluid movement and nodding back to first room in its reengagement of the water motif.

"Hungry Mice & Salty Pepper" can also be read as a hunger for self-determination. Fürnkäs determinedly pursues the physical form, the body, and the gesture. But her dynamic forms do not submit themselves deliberately. On the contrary, the work speaks of a process of control and contradiction, perpetually in negotiation with itself and others. And so the exhibition challenges us to position oneself, to evade its winding tentacles and find stable ground.

Isabella Fürnkäs (b. 1988, Tokyo) has studied fine art with Andreas Gursky and Keren Cytter at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf since 2011 and at the Universität der Künste Berlin as a guest student with Hito Steyerl since 2015. Previously, she studied art history and philosophy at the Universität zu Köln, the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, as well as fine arts at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste Wien. She uses different media in her work and combines them into installations and performances. Since 2015 she has also worked as part of a performance-duo with Lukas von der Gracht.

In 2017 she received a travel grant from the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen as well as a travel grant from the Goethe Institut. She is the recipient of the Förderpreises des Landes NRW 2016 and a recipient of the Paris Cité Grant. Her work has recently been exhibited at the Nam June Paik Art Center Seoul, the Museum Abteiberg (with Lukas von der Gracht), CSA Space Vancouver, and in the project space of the Julia Stoscheck Collection in Düsseldorf.

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