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Jutta Koether

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ARTFORUM

Jutta Koether

GALERIE BUCHHOLZ

Jutta Koether dates her coming of age as an artist to 1982. Her small exhibition here, titled "1982, 1983, 1984," presented a selection of early works produced when Koether was just beginning to find her way around the intense Cologne art scene of the '80s, headed by the milieu's original gangster himself, Martin Kippenberger.

German postmodernism was totally promiscuous, borrowing equally from the European historical avant-garde and the debased, state-sponsored art coming out of East Germany. Mash-ups of high and low fueled a race to the bottom, at least stylistically—the "bad painting" produced at this time was executed by a notoriously macho horde of male artists who were often celebrated for their obnoxious behavior. A woman artist in her twenties would have had a very hard time being taken seriously, but Koether prospered, perhaps because she was so deeply in touch with the cultural vibe across a spectrum of pursuits, such as painting, music, and critical writing. She was also adept at rummaging around the dustbin of forgotten artists and short-lived movements, commingling her findings with samplings from disparate pop-cultural sources. By the 1990s, her canvases had become wondrous, airy abstractions characterized by delirious movement, brilliant color, and bizarre figures.

Three untitled sketches on paper (two ink, one charcoal and ink) from 1982, the earliest works here, respectively featured an abstract Moderne-style head that borrows heavily from Francis Picabia; a portrait of a seated female model "ruined" by a big blob of ink; and a still life of posies in a vase, with a pair of mystery boobs hovering in the composition's upper-left corner. Paintings from 1983, however diminutive in size, sacrificed the charm of the drawings in favor of heavy black outlines, lurid colors, turgid surfaces, and deformed figures.

Jutta Koether, untitled, 1984, oil on canvas board, 8 × 6".

Plenty of evidence suggests that Koether's art during this period was intended to function as a kind of modernist pastiche, as it included garish parodies of works by icons of the Russian vanguard, crude references to twentieth-century "primitivism," and compromised-looking female nudes. An untitled canvas from 1983 depicted a seated model whose head and left hand have been cropped out of the frame. A small oval rendering of the missing hand, painted in the background, calls attention to the absent appendage. Another untitled piece from 1983 showed a woman's torso flipped upside-down. A row of four little brats is pictured at her side, gazing at a black vaginal incision in her abdomen. The painting is so hideous it's funny. Many of the infamous male artists in Cologne embraced ugliness with a vengeance, which was adumbrated by a knowingly stupid breed of rotgut humor. Koether also made sport of sacred cows, but with the super-small scale of her work and its amateurish style, she also conveyed vulnerability—something the guys never could have pulled off.

By 1984, the mood gradually began to change: Her palette lightened, her surfaces became increasingly enlivened and atmospheric. *You Better Get Smart!/Boxerfrau II*, 1984—at almost twenty by sixteen inches,

Jan Avgikos
Jutta Koether. Galerie Buchholz, New York
Artforum, Volume 63, N°2, October, 2024, p.161-162.

one of the largest paintings here—features a pair of pasty arms rising out of a deep-blue zone. The disembodied limbs, sporting bandaged wrists and a big bulbous boxing glove, glow against an open white field. The work, ostensibly a tongue-in-cheek meditation on combat and self-defense, is funny and rambunctious, and foretells the beautiful candy colors that would stream into Koether's future work. It's related to another untitled quasi-landscape from 1984. Approximately eight by six inches, that work possessed three horizontal fields that might be read, in descending order, as blue sky, white sand, and the black depths of outer space. The picture would be bucolic were it not for the big red radiating explosion that dominates the middle area, which calls to mind renderings of fireworks by James Ensor and the painterly blasts of Jules Olitski's late works. *Part of some Totality*, 1983, presented a triangular shape that rests on wheels that look like pimiento-stuffed olives. The subject resembles a child's toy, revved up and ready to zip out of the frame. It gives a glimmer of a style in waiting—let's call it ecstatic libidinal hermeticism—that Koether would lean into for decades. Now we know where it all began.

—*Jan Avgikos*

Jan Avgikos
Jutta Koether. Galerie Buchholz, New York
Artforum, Volume 63, N°2, October, 2024, p.161-162.

The New York Times

Jutta Koether

Jutta Koether, "The World," 2022, which draws from the language of advertisements. Jutta Koether and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; Phoebe d'Heurle

European painting was historically saddled with big tasks: Show God creating humanity; depict a religious vision, martyrdom or political revolution. Modern artists largely shrugged off the so-called "burden of representation" by embracing abstraction, but advertising still shoulders this responsibility, as the artist Jutta Koether shows in her exhibition "eVEryTHinG WilL ChaNGe" at Reena Spaulings.

Martha Schwendener
Jutta Koether
The New York Times, October 5, 2022.
https://urlr.me/6fkQgn

Drawing from advertisements in The Financial Times, the paintings here mine the bombastic and pseudo-sublime messages targeted toward wealthy consumers of yachts, private jets or Europe's new high speed ICE train. They include texts drawn from these ads, like "The World" (2022), which proclaims, "When they ask you where you're from. The World." Other works include platitudes like "Dream until it's your reality." In contrast to glossy print ads, however, Koether paints in a nervous pink-red palette and a scrawled, post-punk idiom that mashes the florid figuration of Florine Stettheimer with the muscular modern marks of Cy Twombly.

There is also a taunting quality to the show — a modified version of what used to be called "critique." After all, the upper-upper classes are winning in most parts of the world (hence the recent, sharp rise in union movements) and painting usually ends up in their hands. The first painting in a lineup of diminutive canvases here has the phrase "100% Malerei" (which translates, from German, to 100% Painting), as if to say, Yes, dear viewer, you may own a yacht or a private jet, but I still control the means of production for painting, the ultimate luxury product.

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TEXTE ZUR KUNST

MAD/AME

Jenny Nachtigall über Jutta Koether im Museum Brandhorst, München

„Jutta Koether: Tour de Madame", Museum Brandhorst, München, 2018, Ausstellungsansicht

Seit den frühen 1980er Jahren hat sich Malerei als zentrales Vehikel einer Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Interessen innerhalb von Jutta Koethers Praxis entwickelt: eine Art Informationsprozessor, der von einer extremen Durchlässigkeit gegenüber Koethers parakünstlerischen Inputs – literarischen Tropen, kunsthistorischen oder theoretischen Modellen oder Pop-Affekten – bestimmt ist. Aus der daraus resultierenden Destabilisierung der malerischen Souveränität hat sie eine eigene Sprache von Farben, Formen, Symbolen und Methoden entwickelt: Der Gebrauch von Text im Bild, das schmutzig-dunkle Rot, das seit den späten 1980ern als ihre *signature*-Farbe fungiert, die Aneignung und letztliche Kannibalisierung des malerischen Kanons sind einige der bekanntesten.[1] In München ist nun zum ersten Mal – und längst überfällig – eine umfassende Werkschau der Malerin Jutta Koether mit rund 150 Arbeiten von 1982 bis heute zu sehen. Die von Achim Hochdörfer und Tonio Kröner am Museum Brandhorst kuratierte Ausstellung „Jutta Koether – Tour de Madame" zeigt Koethers (An-)Forderungen an dieses Medium und seine Kapazitäten.[2] Zur Ausstellung erschien außerdem ein etwa 350 Seiten langer, reich bebilderter Katalog mit der bisher vollständigsten Werkliste und Bibliografie der Künstlerin sowie Essays prominenter Kunsthistoriker*innen zu ihrer Malerei.[3]

Koethers Positionierung in einer malerischen Genealogie ist heute (wie übrigens auch schon vor mehr als zehn Jahren)[4] für viele dennoch nicht ganz schlüssig. Was ist mit den Texten, der Musik, der Performance? Die permanente Bewegung aus der Malerei heraus und wieder in sie zurück, Vielfachfunktionen und -interessen sind zwar

Jenny Nachtigall
MAD/AME
Texte zur Kunst, N°111, September, 2018, p.175-179.

Jutta Koether, „Untitled“, 1983

seit jeher Teil von Koethers Praxis – konzeptuelle Beschränkung, die Wahl nur eines materiellen Outputs gehören aber auch schon seit Langem dazu (man denke z. B. an das Rot). In München ist dieser Output die Malerei selbst. Da es sich um eine museale Präsentation handelt, ist das konsequent. Der Kontext fordert das in gewisser Weise ein – nicht so sehr, weil ein Noise-Konzert im Untergeschoss sich vielleicht irgendwie falsch anfühlen würde oder die Präsentation der Texte über die malerische Produktion Gefahr laufen könnte, sie zu verkunsten. Vielmehr in dem Sinne, dass Koethers Praxis schon immer eine des begehrlichen Zugriffs war: Sie fügt sich Kontexten nicht ein, sie stellt ihre eigenen her. „Tour de Madame“ ist ihr Zugriff auf den Kontext einer musealen Retrospektive, auf die Bedingungen (der Präsentation und Wahrnehmung) von Kunst, die dieser Kontext setzt. Koethers Umgang mit Form kennt dabei keine ästhetische Hierarchie. Für sie wird der museale Kontext zu einer Form unter vielen, die sie – genauso wie Cézannes Äpfel, van Goghs Arabesken, Lucien Freuds Akte oder die Figur des Genies selbst – zu ihrer eigenen macht.

Exemplarisch hierfür ist das Herzstück der Ausstellung, der „Tour de Madame“-Zyklus (2018), eine Art Retrospektive in der Retrospektive im Untergeschoss des Museums, in der Koether Motive, Bewegungen und Methoden ihrer malerischen Position der letzten gut 35 Jahre noch mal neu durchspielt, die Palette neu mischt. Die halbrunde Glaskonstruktion auf der zwölf Bilder installiert sind, spiegelt den Grundriss von Cy Twomblys monumentalem „Lepanto“-Zyklus (dem Mittelpunkt der ständigen Sammlungs-

Jenny Nachtigall
MAD/AME
Texte zur Kunst, N°111, September, 2018, p.175-179.

Jutta Koether, „Lucian David and Eli“, 2014

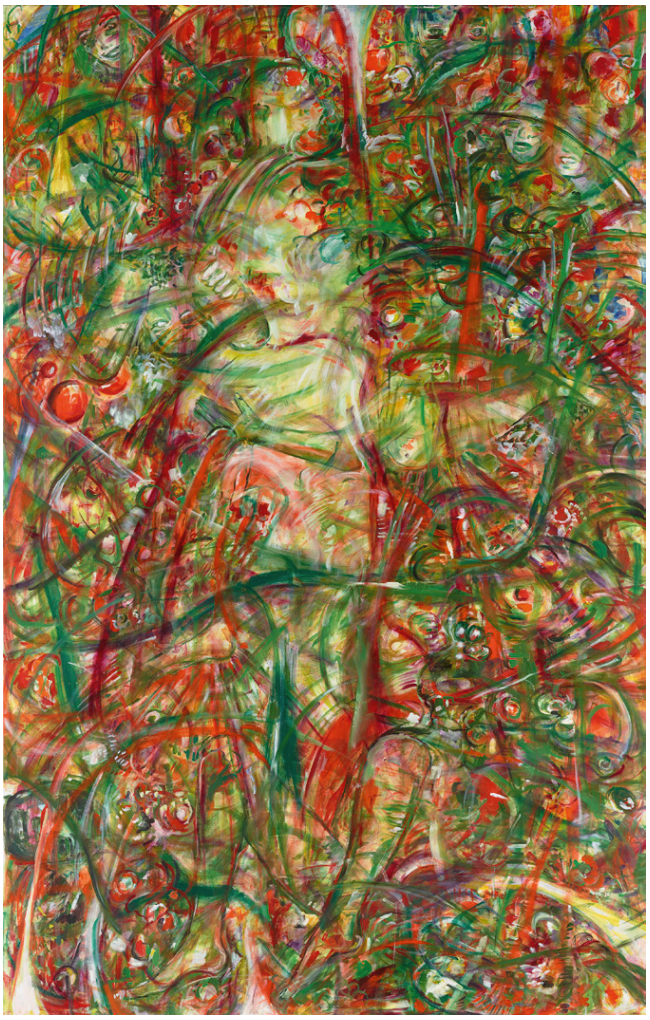
präsentation) im Obergeschoss – aka Tour de Monsieur.

Die Gesamtstruktur von „Tour de Madame“ ist chronologisch und größtenteils nach Koethers Ausstellungen geordnet. So werden auf der ersten Etage die in den frühen 1980ern im Kölner Umfeld des Neoexpressionismus entstandenen Bilder zum ersten Mal gezeigt. Im angrenzenden Raum folgen die musikinfizierten Malereien (z. B. die „Blues“-Bilder, 1984/85), die sie während ihrer Arbeit bei *SPEX* produzierte. Über Koethers Einzelausstellung in der Grazer Galerie Bleich-Rossi (in der Rot und das Raster programmatisch wurden) und die ersten großen Setzungen, „Kissing the Canvas“ (1990) und den „100% Malereien“ (1991), nähert man sich schließlich den New Yorker Anfängen mit „The Inside Job“ (1992). Den Abschluss des ersten Stockwerks bilden schließlich Koethers Einzelausstellungen (1993, 1999) in der Pat Hearn Gallery in New York.

Die retrospektive Linearität, die dieser Aufbau suggeriert, wird gleich im ersten Ausstellungsraum gebrochen: „Golden Days“ (2014) und „Lucian David and Eli“ (2014), zwei große diaphane Kompositionen der letzten Jahre, hängen hier neben und über Koethers kleinformatigen Malereien aus der Kölner Zeit – pastose Leinwände, auf denen in verdichtetem Pinselstrich geometrische und organische Formen abgebildet sind, die Körperlichkeit suggerieren, aber keinem bestimmten Körper zugeordnet werden können. Im Untergeschoss kehrt diese Spannung in anderer Konstellation wieder. Im Gegenüber der objekthaften Haptik der „Zodiac Nudes“-Serie (2016) und den transparent geschichteten Oberflächen von Bildern wie „Freud Broodthaers #2“ (2016). Statt der Überwindung vorheriger Formen, Farben oder Methoden sieht man hier also ihre Metamorphosen, ihre Loops: Loops innerhalb der Ausstellung und ihrer Räume wie auch zwischen den Arbeiten selbst. Im ersten Raum gibt es z. B. die (Warhol-)Bananen-Form, die in „Untitled“ (1983) auf einem schematisch angedeuteten Gesicht mit geschminktem Auge als lässige Frisur funktioniert. Im benachbarten „Lucian David and Eli“ (2014) erscheint sie dann als schlaffes, leicht deplatziertes Glied an einem sexuell verunklärten Körper. Lucian David and Eli … „and Andy?“, phallisches Haar, haarige Bananen.

Die extreme Statik und Enge der frühen Bilder suggeriert nicht nur Verletzlichkeit (z. B. die einer Malerin im *Bro Environment* des Neoexpressionismus), sondern auch die Bereitschaft, sich zu wehren. Ihre intensive Dichte ist so fixierend wie ein Medusablick. In Hélène Cixous' feministischer Relektüre des Mythos hieß es bereits 1975

Jenny Nachtigall
MAD/AME
Texte zur Kunst, N°111, September, 2018, p.175-179.



Jutta Koether, „The Inside Job“, 1992

wie auch in Reaktion auf die Lesart von Medusa als einer verfemten Kastrationsfigur monströser Weiblichkeit: Medusa lacht.[5] 1989 machte Koether in ihrem „3rd-Generation-Women Fem-Trash-Manifest“ einen ähnlichen Zug: „Fem-Trash heißt, die eigene Unnatürlichkeit als Frau im Kapitalismus zu steigern. Offensiv gebrochen sein, ‚krank‘ sein, Vielfachfunktionen einnehmen, sich zelebrieren.“[6]

Die Steigerung der Vielfachfunktionen und Widersprüche der Malerei und der Position als Malerin – und das 100 Prozent – wird ab hier programmatisch. Nach den „eingeklemmten Bildern“ der frühen 1980er und der im zweiten Raum zu sehenden Diffusion ihrer rauen Farbpanzer in die pastelligen Farbtöne der Text-Bilder markiert das Diptychon „Kissing the Canvas“ (1990) diesen Wendepunkt: Es zeigt die Intensivierung von Koethers bereits bestehendem Formrepertoire (z. B. die Kreise, die Arabesken, die Textelemente). Das Rot ist maximal hochgefahren. Dieses laute Bekenntnis zur Malerei kam wohlbemerkt zu einem Zeitpunkt, als zum zigsten Mal ihr Abgesang prophezeit wurde. Koether malte

Jenny Nachtigall
MAD/AME
Texte zur Kunst, N°111, September, 2018, p.175-179.

weiter, ohne sich auf ein Template zu versteifen.

Im Untergeschoss sieht man die Entwicklung ihrer Malerei seit den 2000er Jahren bis heute: die Farbraster, die Materialbilder mit Devotionalien aus Punk und Noise, die transparenten Zeichen-Körper nach Freud, Balthus u. a. – und natürlich auch die berühmten Poussin-„Adaptionen", der „The Seasons"-Zyklus (2011) und „Hot Rod (after Poussin)" (2009). Nicht zuletzt die performative Aktivierung von Malereien wie „Hot Rod" war zentraler Bezugspunkt für Theorien zur Netzwerklogik der Gegenwartsmalerei und zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Subjektstatus. Mit Lecture Performances/Texten wie „Mad Garland" hat Koether selbst aktiv an diesen Diskursen partizipiert.[7] In ihrer Retrospektive scheint es eine Verschiebung innerhalb dieser Position zu geben.

Im letzten Ausstellungsraum wird eine Reihe von Koethers „digitalen Dossiers" projiziert, Sammlungen von Materialien, mit denen sie sich während der Produktion verschiedener Werkgruppen beschäftigt hat. Im Folder zu „Tour de Madame" gibt es ein Blatt mit Notizen zum Titel, darunter u. a: „MAD/AME". MAD AME, als Amalgam aus Englisch und Französisch, ließe sich als „verrückte Seele", besser noch als „verrückter Geist" lesen, als fortlaufendes dezentrieren – ver/rücken – stabiler Bedeutungen und geistiger Tatsachen durch Vielfachfunktionen. Wie „Tour de Madame" zeigt, sind die Konsequenzen solcher Eingriffe ins Diskursive materiell und körperlich: eine Destabilisierung/Reorganisierung der Wahrnehmungsmuster, die uns eingeschrieben sind und deren diskursive (kunsthistorische) Formung ein musealer Rahmen notwendig setzt. In München verschieben die Leinwände bar jedes performativen Supports die Aufmerksamkeit von Koethers Aktivierung der Malerei, von ihrem Körper nicht zuletzt zu unseren eigenen: Die Überblendung und Manipulation verschiedener kunsthistorischer Bildcodes in ihren Arbeiten, und pointiert in „Tour de Madame", fordern eine Positionierung, fordern dazu auf, Farbe (und Linie) zu bekennen. Koether lässt Betrachter*innen damit zu einem Teil des malerischen „Beziehungsproblems" werden. Status: It's complicated.

„Jutta Koether: Tour de Madame", Museum Brandhorst, München, 18. Mai bis 21. Oktober 2018.

Anmerkungen

1 Dazu vgl. Jutta Koether/Isabelle Graw, „Painting Abuse – ein Gespräch zwischen Jutta Koether und Isabelle Graw", in: *Lerchen_feld*, HFBK, 10, 2011, S. 19–24.

2 Die Ausstellung wurde in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Mudam Luxembourg –Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean organisiert, wo sie vom 8. Februar bis 12. Mai 2019 zu sehen sein wird.

3 Vgl. Jutta Koether. Tour de Madame, Ausst.-Kat., hg. von Achim Hochdörfer/Tonio Kröner, Museum Brandhorst, 2018/Mudam Luxembourg, 2019, Köln 2018.

4 Vgl. Diedrich Diederichsen, „Das Treffen der anwesenden mit der abwesenden Künstlerin", in: Jutta Koether, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 2006, S. 74–77, hier: S. 74.

5 Vgl. Hélène Cixous, Das Lachen der Medusa, hg. von Esther Hutfless/Gertrude Postl/Elisabeth Schäfer, übers. von Claudia Simma, Wien 2013.

6 Jutta Koether, „3rd-Generation-Women Fem-Trash-Manifest", in: *Eau de Cologne*, 3, 1989, S. 56–61, hier: S. 57.

7 Vgl. David Joselit, „Painting Beside Itself", in: *October*, 130, 2009, S. 125–134, und Isabelle Graw/Daniel Birnbaum/Nikolaus Hirsch (Hg.), Art and Subjecthood. The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism, Berlin 2011.

Jenny Nachtigall
MAD/AME
Texte zur Kunst, N°111, September, 2018, p.175-179.

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Flash Art

42 – 61 Under Female Competence

Jutta Koether is a central figure in the recent history of painting. On the occasion of this summer's ambitious survey of Koether's work at the Museum Brandhorst, Munich, this issue of *Flash Art* presents the following special dossier on the artist. Kerstin Stakemeier discusses Koether's paintings in the gendered and art-historical afterlife of mannerism, while Quinn Latimer considers Koether's novella *f.*, first published in German in 1987.
Koether was also a contri-butor to *Flash Art* in the late 1980s. Reproduced here is an essay Koether wrote for the magazine in April 1986, in which she reflects on how certain female artists have defied the status quo.

Jutta Koether's exhibition "Tour de Madame" will be on view at Museum Brandhorst, Munich, from May 18 to October 21, 2018.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Beyond the Beautiful View, 1993.
Oil on canvas. 97 × 77 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

i

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

45

A Sexed Mannerism

By Kerstin Stakemeier

Since the 1980s, Jutta Koether has summoned, intensified, distributed, and branched out a form of painterly mannerism, producing a consistent painterly non-masculine sex. Koether commands a unique mastery in her field of work, since her mannerism is made up of highly contemporary chimeras of unmodern (painting) pasts, which are kept in constant painterly motion between oil, criticism, theory, performance, and music. Koether does not legitimize herself against painterly tradition, but rather lets its accumulated unmodernness come to her. She continuously recomposes newly conjured centers of perception in painterly forms, which appear more as contested artistic nodes than aesthetic highlights of achievement. Heinrich Wölfflin, one of the founding fathers of academic formalism in German-speaking art history, saw in mannerism a central threat, or, more precisely, the "bewildering alienation of the sign from the thing" in that "the representational signs have severed themselves completely from real form," "a form-alienated technique."[1] The seemingly endless desire in Koether's paintings for her body's presence, *her praxis as a painter*, summons a libidinal and endless series of historical revenants from the traditional narratives of modern painting that appear, recede, and return before us — a series of "form-alienated techniques." An argument by philosopher Alenka Zupančičs comes to mind in the context of Koether's ever-evolving and divergent reproduction of painting: "human sexuality is 'sexual' (and not simply 'reproductive'), as the standardization of all instincts toward a single purpose never really works, but allows the various partial instincts to continue their circular, self-sustaining activity."[2] Koether's handling of the genre of painting as a model that is continuously repeated and that, in all its contemporaneity, is ultimately historical, demonstrates exactly this in her field: a multifaceted libidinal self-deviation. Koether's work in *every* medium is painterly, as she allows the reproductive traits of painting to proliferate in mannerist deviations in each of them.

Koether's contribution to the hundredth issue anniversary edition of *Texte zur Kunst*, a journal she has been closely linked to since its beginnings in Cologne in the early 1990s, was a kind of confession letter. But, contrary to the bourgeois convention, this confession was an aesthetic form free of avowal. She characterizes herself as "an artist who made a life decision to paint."[3] "In my world, this meant reconfiguring the old canon as counter-canon, so to speak, by means of a play/performance practice."[4] The self-commitment to the canon is followed by its radical intensification toward Koether herself. The confession is that of her own embodiment of painting. In this way, Koether lists *her* canon-horde, which goes from Edouard Manet, via Henri Matisse and Florentine Stettheimer, Joan Mitchell, William S. Burroughs, Sigmar Polke, Pierre Klossowski, Francis Bacon, and Jacques Lacan, among others, to Nicolas Poussin. This epic series of inputs isn't included here as a form of relativization, but rather, in Peter Gorsen's words, these figures here return "under female competence."[5] Koether's application of painting history "under female competence" changes its societal position entirely.

In the last few years, this historical lineup has especially featured Baroque painter Poussin. And Koether's approach is two-sided, always foregrounding an unbridled extension of the painterly past into the present and its resolute restaging as the present. Georges Bataille, already in his 1961 book *The Tears of Eros*, identified Poussin as a misconstrued eroticist,[6] as a misunderstood mannerist. And in the 1930s Carl Einstein recognized a "periodicity of regression"[7] in his works. Koether makes very visible use of him, as she does of others who enter her form. The references in Koether's scenes remain integrated, recognizable, readable, yet the deterritorialization of these historical figures simultaneously lies precisely in their isolation, their visibility as elements of *her* body of painting, of *her* painterly aesthetic practice. Their isolation is what makes their radical presence readable — as an attribute of the artist, as directed desire. A permanently sexed space, which, however, can never be naturalized: Koether behaves like a male painter in the form of a female painter. Koether arranges her canon-horde in and outside of painting proper; it is a feminine mannerism, composed with and within this painting, the feminine as a painterly form, a feminine that repeatedly becomes as much hermaphroditic as androgynous, since it arranges the attributes of gender in alternating motions as parts of her painterly metamorphosis. In this way, the mannerist character of Poussin's painting is now ultimately more in Koether's hands than in Poussin's. She repeatedly reveals the exaggerated severity of Poussin's painterly compositions as a deeply mannerist manifestation of the inevitable aesthetic abstraction that separated him from the naturalization of his body. It is Poussin's aesthetic consequence itself that is rendered mannerist in the face of the real. By thus denying the ordering power of narratives of historical progress, Koether implements a perpetually antagonistic actualization of her ancestral horde. Koether presents these historical figures in their shifting confrontation with the present, with what lives, as revenants, as brutal simultaneities. The actualization of pasts is always that of their brutalities. And with this deviance from the model of historical fulfillment, Koether's ancestral horde shifts its sexed mode of functioning: sex shifts from subjective feature to individuating attribute. Sex becomes the art of refusing reproductive conditioning. Sex becomes the working form of a deviant painterly metabolism. Koether's present is composed of a profoundly inconsistent time, which finds a measure in its re-appropriations, in constant assertions of a radically non-simultaneous absolute simultaneity: the painterly sexual aesthetic of a causally mannerist sex: useless in terms of developmental logic, but extremely productive for someone expanding an unbounded femininity through every sex.

In 2012, Koether produced a series of works following and actualizing Poussin's last cycle, the *Four Seasons* (1660–64). Titled *The Seasons*, Koether's series consisted of three complete sets, two of which were exhibited in parallel in the Whitney Biennial in New York and in an exhibition of reproductions at Bortolami gallery. The third set of small "material image versions"[8] was exhibited at the Reena Spaulings Fine Art booth at the first Frieze New York. The Whitney series, which is the only cycle that remains undivided, traveled to Dundee Contemporary Arts and Arnolfini in Bristol in 2013, and there was combined with Koether's second Poussin series, *The Seven Sacraments* (2012–13). *The Seasons* wandered through a sequence of different exhibition formats, in which they were not only regrouped in ever-changing installation scenarios, but also presented alongside a variety of texts. These included, among Koether's own notes, short texts that Jay Sanders, co-curator of the Whitney Biennial, wrote for

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

each of the seasons, and which Koether integrated on the back sides of some of the paintings in subsequent exhibitions; the catalogue contributions that Michael Sanchez and Jeff Nagy, Graham Domke and Axel Wieder authored for the exhibitions in Bristol, and a series of (partial) reviews. The reception of this body of work is compartmentalized in space and time, it breaches out, and its seasons insert this spatial and temporal compartmentalization into our present; they exhibit approaches to life between crisis, catastrophe, and free play. "Poussin's *Winter* is apocalyptic, with a biblical flood," Koether said in an interview; "my *Winter* uses the same composition to create a pretext that draws you in."[9] Whereas Poussin's abstraction was in catastrophizing the seasons as human fates, Koether isolates in them a fateful present. As she concludes in one of her notes on Poussin's *Winter*: "So, look at the real without synthesis."[10] In their text on Koether's cycle, Sanchez and Nagy further quote from her notes that the series could have been titled *The Seasons: Crises*. For in it, Koether's sense of painting's urgency as an aesthetic form for *any* time meets its envisioned *acute* urgency, which she embraces as a form of embodiment of one's own lifetime. Her *Seasons* are specific crises: "the Arab Spring, the Greek Summer, the NY Autumn (Occupy Wall Street)" and the "Euro Crises."[11] In her paintings and their installation, in the performative approaches and the texts that appear around them, Koether measures not only her distance from Poussin, but also the distance between her various spaces of painterly performance: their reception doesn't provide the contemplative abstraction of their own present, but rather an assisted present shock of both this and past presents. As Sanders concludes in a short text on *Summer*: "a developing diagram of the phantasmagoric in which we all live."[12] Remembering Zupančič's argument of sex's necessary deviationist nature, this phantasmagoria becomes perceivable as a permanent crisis that knows no end, only new transition points.

"I made the disconnected compatible"[13] is one of the ways Koether characterizes the artistic approach that has, in various ways, accompanied her since the 1980s. In a sense, Koether always seems to understand her approach as a kind of *unsolicited* synthesis. What might initially appear to be a transgressive standard of production — such as the spread of her work across aesthetic modes as a "music critic, musician, writer, theoretician, art critic"[14] — could in this sense also be understood as its opposite: as a rampant synthesis that moves through a conditioned reality, whose power center is the painterly. A steady shifting of the boundary instead of its breach. An extension of painterly compatibility, not the transgression of its genuinely distinguished areas. Ultimately, Koether does not seem to recognize their separation as non-painterly anyway. The fact that she usually shows her paintings as installations corresponds to a standard form of upgrading painting within today's museum-assisted "installation aesthetics."[15] But with Koether the installations don't serve as the ornamental completion of an oeuvre or a context, but are rather always used as a kind of localized spacer. Ultimately they are painterly isolation aids, configurations of the paintings' visibilities. Koether's oeuvre spreads through decentralization, as a series of radically synthesizable series of inclusion, reappropriations of widely visible cultural tropes of various origins reduced both to themselves and to the painter. In her 2011 text *Mad Garland*,[16] she summarized another dimension of her confessional letter:

> This is not a performance. This is not a program. This is not a theory. This is not an opinion. This is the reappropriation of all the above techniques. This is a reappropriation of the means of struggle. Redefine painting as the demarcation line between materialism and idealism.[17]

Wherever Koether expels figuration from its painterly naturalizations — where she fundamentally produces overloads, which always also reveal an inherent sense of abstraction in the translucent colors of each of their embodiments, in all the lines of demarcation and challenges that permeate her metamorphic approaches — there always remains something genuinely pleasurable. Koether's hermaphroditic and androgynous overstatements ultimately relish in making catastrophic every possibility of a calming painterly narrative. And her narrowly delineated yet all-encompassing boundless syntheses also superimpose the present as an ultimately historical form. Here, Koether intervenes: her painting places continuous ruptures into the presence of the present, a canon of forms that turns out, under "female competence," to be as hermaphroditic as it is androgynous. Because Koether's "female competence" ultimately offers not an alternative, but rather a concatenation of problems.

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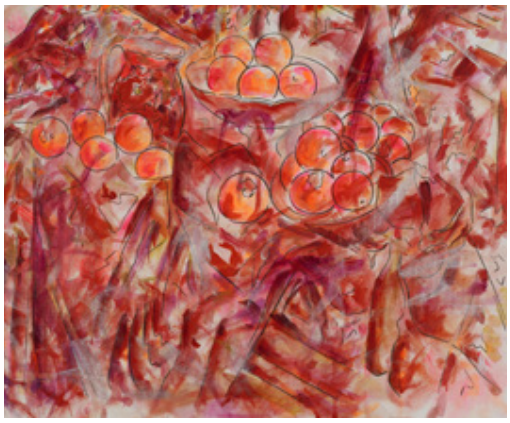
1 Martin Warnke, "Heinrich Wölfflin," in *Representations*, no. 27 (Summer, 1989), pp. 172–190, here p. 179.
2 Alenka Zupančič, *Why Psychoanalysis: Three Interventions*, Nordic Summer University Press, 2008, p. 15.
3 Jutta Koether, "Figure of Paint: Am Unwiderlegbaren!," in *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 100, "The Canon" (December, 2015), p. 135.
4 Jutta Koether, "Figure of Paint," p. 137. This issue includes both a German original and English translation of this text, in which "Bespielung/Auffürungspraxis" is translated as "performance practice." The above quote reproduces the wording of the German original.
5 Peter Gorsen, "Frauen und Frauenbilder in der Kunstgeschichte," in Gislind Nabakowski, Helke Sander (eds.), *Frauen in der Kunst*, vol. 2, Edition Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1980, p. 148.
6 George Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, City Light Publishers, San Francisco, 2001 (first published 1961), p. 58.
7 Carl Einstein, "Diese Aesthetiker veranlassen uns," in Werke, Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Berliner Ausgabe, vol. 4 (edited by Uwe Fleckner, Thomas Gaehtgens), Berlin, 1996, p. 217.
8 From an email from Jutta Koether.
9 Brent Gregston, "The Fifth Season," in *A Magazine Curated by* (October–November 2012), pp. 218–219.
10 *Jutta Koether. Seasons and Sacraments*, exhibition catalogue, Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2013, p. 41.
11 *Jutta Koether. Seasons and Sacraments*, p. 41.
12 Jay Sanders, text for "the seasons," for Jutta Koether's participation in the Whitney Biennial 2012, Whitney Museum, New York.
13 *Jutta Koether. Fantasia Colonia*, exhibition catalogue, Kölnischer Kunstverein/Kunsthalle Bern, DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, Cologne, 2006, p. 38.
14 *Jutta Koether. Fantasia Colonia*, p. 38.
15 See Juliane Rebentisch, *Ästhetik der Installation*, Edition Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2003.
16 Jutta Koether, "Mad Garland," in Daniel Birnbaum, Isabelle Graw (eds.), *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, Sternberg Press, Berlin/New York, 2011, pp. 80–94, here p. 82.
17 Jutta Koether, "Mad Garland," p. 92.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

iii



iv

v

vi

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Pure Invention
By Jutta Koether

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jimson Weed / White Flower No. 1*, 1932.
Oil on canvas. 40 × 40 inches. Photography by Edward C. Robinson III.
Courtesy of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.

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Apr–May 1986

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

"If Giotto, the obscure shepherd boy, and Van Gogh with his fits could make it, why not women? […] What is important is that women face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation. Disadvantage may indeed be an excuse; it is not, however, an intellectual position."
— Linda Nochlin

This is neither the time nor the place to talk about disadvantages. These should be left aside for the time being, because a list of the disadvantages that women artists have to surmount would only result in yet another of those tiresome, counterproductive itemizations. "Just let me lie here," would be the weary and passively resigned response, for which the only remedy would be to draw up lists of female artists again. As for alibis and false evidences, which always have something in common with monuments to unknown soldiers, these can be taken care of in one clean sweep. So now it's your turn, out onto the front!
And out come those women artists, exceptions produced by alibi rhetoric, who cannot advance an inch further than the (male alibi) system allows them. Phrases like, "I don't differentiate between male and female art" coming from the lips of a woman artist (like Grace Hartigan, for example) say nothing about having overcome anything, and only aid and abet the old well-known excuses and confirm the status quo.
At the most, those women artists who have learned how to imitate, but have never been prepared to bring their inventions into play, perform strategic maneuvers. "Good inventions are the dramatization of their own functioning," observe Frieda Grafe and Enno Patalas on invention in film. Let us apply this to the demands on the female artist. That is: instead of reflecting a bad reality (the listing of disadvantages that was the norm in "tampon art," as feminist navel-contemplating, defensive art was once derisorily called), today, as the errors of this "tampon art" have been sufficiently analyzed, an arbitrarily placed invention of reality must be instigated and pushed to its extremes.
This exaggeration comes through neither in the work of those who have narratively probed the problematics (like the "surrealist" painters from Frida Kahlo to Dorothea Tanning) nor in that of those (like Grace Hartigan or Joan Mitchell) who have "purely formally" chosen not to distinguish themselves from their male colleagues and act as if there were no female history and therefore no female sex.
Only those who have had the courage to wage large-scale attacks on the avant-garde of their times come into consideration: Susan Rothenberg, for example, and of course Georgia O'Keeffe. Two cases that prove it is possible to develop and pursue strategies instead of being content with executing single strategic maneuvers. But strategy also means perseverance, not only in the acceptance of the meaning that one's own work has for oneself as well as for the collectivity, the public, but also in the repeated assertion of it. Defensiveness is forbidden.
There are few women artists who have managed to do this. Most of them have exhausted themselves and dissipated their energies in single operations (maneuvers); even an artist like Meret Oppenheim would have to be counted among them.
In Georgia O'Keeffe's case this worked, it was able to work, because she forged a weapon out of the compulsion of belief, the female one, with the aid of monotony, repetition, and techniques of perseverance, with which to construct those paradoxes that always determine an essential work, finally to take up the offensive and ride the assault, not as the martyred, suffering, defensive individual that woman (and especially the woman artist) is gladly transfigured into and gladly lets herself be transfigured into. No pleasure in defeat.
Georgia O'Keeffe, heroically isolated and closed in, repeatedly broke out of this isolation and answered back, stood her ground and defended herself.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Even contemporary American women artists have that advantage over the Europeans that Andy Warhol still has over every German artist (and while we're on the subject of women, Marlene Dietrich always had over Greta Garbo), that is, a superior attitude toward their own artificiality, their own invention and fiction, which does not refer to anything higher or different, and does not even necessitate a quotation of the superior. Cool profanation is successful where banalities are strictly subordinated to a strategy and formally welded together until bonded, until a dynamic of compulsion occurs that reveals no will, no cramping: but that clears the way for the controlled neurosis of the superior woman artist. Art is never healthy, but it is never only sick either.

We can actually be grateful for the embarrassing and sick excesses of self-recrimination (camouflaged as self-presentation) that caused the inflation of "women's art" in the 1970s. They patently demonstrated that working with personal suffering from the position of subjective oppression — as opposed to objective analysis — leads to self-humiliation and autism. Not only is there nothing right here, but there is nothing exciting either. Excitement has to be controlled, but invention has to be pure!

"Go home and work. That's all I can tell anyone," said Georgia O'Keeffe. The content is right, the categorical tone is equally right, just as the content of her paintings, the flowers, the bones, and the colors agree with the incisiveness and urgency of their form (that urgency, however, that comes from monotony and compulsion of repetition), defying the search for authorship and the idealization of the artist's personality, and, although the work is visibly singular, it constantly volunteers its services and provokes impact. In a different way the same can apply to Cindy Sherman, who can be considered as a model for women painters — in one respect: the renewal of codes or new artistic language or manners of speech comes about from the consciousness of one's own second-rateness or, more depreciatively, "secondarity." The photographic medium is more prepared to accept the loss of the classic author principle, or rather, to lay open the question of the author principle — and thus the question of the persistence of betrayed ideals and ideologies like that of original genius, that One who always bars the way for the Other, women. Cindy Sherman exploits all this.

The male painter, faced with the loss of originality, which among other things, our century and its inflations have bestowed upon him, helps himself to exaggerated forms of originality, i.e., phantom and pseudo-originality, in order to satirize not only himself as an author, but also his work; but on the other hand, he inconsistently strives for identity again (from Lüpertz to Schnabel), he does not entertain "secondarity," and he continually produces a mirror of himself as a painter-prince.

Despite the slight irony they allow themselves, these painters cling to the question of authorship and originality, and contribute little if anything to a renewal of language. In the end, with all the risks they run, what is left is their artist egos, which feel threatened by an infiltration of deconstructivist techniques.

An artist like Cindy Sherman, in comparison, is not afraid of deconstruction. She is in a position to work with it, or rather, she has reached this position precisely through deconstruction. She rubs salt into the wound and treats herself to pure invention. The fruits of this refusal and shamelessness with which the forms of the self-presentations as we know them from the first unsure tentatives of women's art, can and should today be seen also as purifications, making Cindy Sherman's game and its appreciation possible. Now there is clarity and a slice of history as a backbone, and that is more than any woman artist had one hundred or even ten years ago. And for

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Bettina Semmer, *Fisch auf Pferd*, 1983.
Acrylic on canvas. 150 × 190 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Mikey Cuddihy in her studio, Riverside Studios, London, 1985.
Courtesy of the artist.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

women artists, to ignore this history or dismiss it as obstructive can only be prohibited, even though blood and dirt still cling to it. The strategy mentioned above can only be developed when the story of all women artists, the cleverer and the less brilliant ones, has been processed. Precisely pure, arbitrary invention is only valid when it has been built on the ground of the past. Everything else would be too easy … just a strategic maneuver, suppression, boredom.

So, out of the ruins! But it is obligatory to go through them first. Then: intervene, dirty your hands, work, produce, put yourselves on show, bring yourselves into discussion. Gertrude Stein adopted such a process in a model way. A self-evident, massive attack in the broadest sense of the word. Her work can stand next to Joyce, precisely because that's where she saw herself. At the same time this process must be kept under control, and the mise-en-scène amplified with the work, perfected.

Women artists are often afraid; obsessively afraid of being understood as just that, as women artists. Often they prefer to lurk anonymously and mutely in isolation, considering intervention in history as a burden. It isn't their history anyway. But now that objective intervention has gained currency and consequently can no longer be tossed off lightly and the ghettos are about to be abolished, it's time to speak up. And many are doing just that. In some cases speech is dissected and put back together again, as in the work of Jenny Holzer, directly: speech as speech, in sentences. In others: speech in images.

The struggle for content: the practice of dismantling principal errors also means appropriating existing forms. "But we're living in times in which we've moved away from totally excluding any particular method. We can innocently use one of those methods whose guilt we don't acknowledge, that is, whose original historical purpose we observe with a mixture of doubt, aversion, and emotion (with simple errors); others require a guilty use" (Diedrich Diederichsen).

Gallery owner Monika Sprüth has attempted to do precisely this with her project "Eau de Cologne." The exhibition catalogue with works by women artists is designed in the style of Andy Warhol's magazine. *Interview*, that is, in the elegant exhibitionist style that says, "these are the things/people that you should take into account."

The works shown (by Barfuss, Kruger, Holzer, Trockel, and Sherman) presented the latest achievements in the merging of photography and painting. Rosemarie Trockel also exhibited knit-works that look like a revolt against all the feminist atrocities of the past; some of them, in spite of all good advice and warnings, have simple, familiar subjects, such as signs of the German wool industry, or the *Playboy* bunny. Similarly, in her paintings of vases, instead of a dramatic mass of symbols of the kind that so often ends up in dramatic nothingness, she treats this worn-out symbol in a cold and energetic way, bringing it to a purer and plainer form by lining several vases up in rows in which one of them contrasts with the other. Here and there something is intentionally put in the wrong place. The *Playboy* logo in a knitted image: something doesn't fit. But it works. And its function is fulfilled. Women are not fit to be artists so says the law. But they work anyway; and even this function can be fulfilled.

There are women who paint. They do so neither out of pure passion nor out of the desire to participate or share in the same will that the painter-princes so arrogantly boast — for it is an illusion that this pure imitation of such a will could lead to freedom and personal statement — but only out of the understanding that no method should be totally excluded. For the time being no passion for this medium is involved, no blind devotion, but rather an arbitrary dramatization.

Lisa Milroy's paintings indulge in the charm of beautiful things: a crisp

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

conservative painting style, almost penetrating; but her objects dwell in their casual, equalitarian, anti-hierarchical order (shoes, books, coats, skirts, etc.). In their cool existence, on a blank white background, in a world that has allowed them to move freely, to unite dramatically in all directions without cultural obligation. The attitude of "secondarity" permits things, invented things, to spread out. Lisa Milroy lays bare these methods by literally making them the contents of her pictures.

Similarly Anne Loch's landscapes are references to something that cannot be represented realistically, that is, realistic representations are used, but as personal will. What does this will want? Not to bring to mind at all costs something that has not yet been represented, but to realize it. Things not yet said: objects, landscapes — not ethereally idealized, but very real, direct, opulent, and nevertheless distanced. Coolness and difference. Beauty in a twisted way because it simultaneously represents beauty, in an exploitative and revealing way, as it also appears in Bettina Semmer's paintings: that is, no longer holding back, taking the freedom to represent a "cow" as an idiotically staring animal head on a female body holding an apple. That is, exposing oneself to the evident paranoia of so-called feminine painting and pushing this whole complex one step further until it becomes a movement. That is, entertaining, commentating, and exhausting. Here personal work methods are reflected upon and examined, as must be required of contemporary art (as I demand from my own work), which should speak of triumphs even if there are no final victories.

On the edge of the picture there is chaos, inside the picture it is pushed out. I want to talk about crises that are methodically constructed, as the art of language in pictures, and therefore as pure invention. Until someone comes along and invents the illumination. For the second time.

(Translated from German by Janice Guy.)

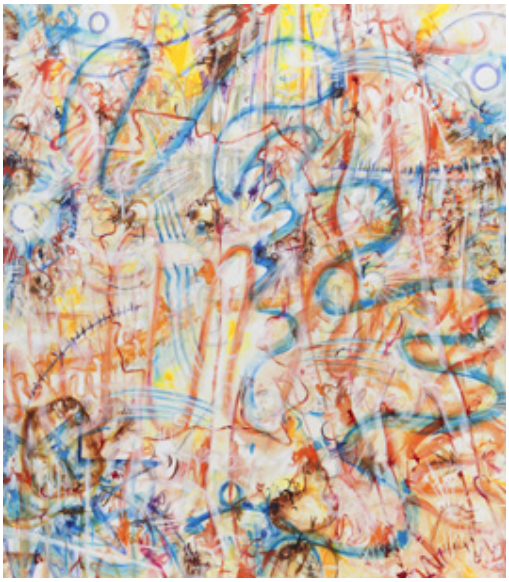
Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #145*, 1985.
Color photograph in artist's frame. 72 1/2 × 49 1/2 inches.
Courtesy of Skarstedt, New York. Copyright of Cindy Sherman.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

vii

viii



xi

x

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

xi

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

59

Now She Brings the Things into Motion: Jutta Koether's *f.*

By Quinn Latimer

In the hours before I sat down to read *f.*, I fought with my cell phone provider, bought a new lipstick, threw out some old flowers, and looked at some paintings in a book. The visual identity of my phone company: red. The lipstick: red. The flowers, the paintings: all red, or variations of. The sky above my terrace also strangely red: it was March in Athens and the wind was blowing sand from the Sahara across the Libyan Sea. The sky was full of the Sahara and I was inside, reading *f.*, Jutta Koether's 1987 novella-*cum*-meditation on painting and womanhood (whatever each of those things is) and those stages we create out of the conditions for each. In Koether's book, first published by the Austrian gallery Bleich-Rossi and recently translated into English by Nick Mauss and Michael Sanchez in a beautiful edition for Sternberg Press, the trappings of these stages — heavy velvet curtains, dark wooden floors — are red for sure, the color that stains *f.* and its central artists and objects (lipstick, coral necklaces, velvet, red paint, fire). What else stains Koether's small book, seeps through its pale pages (those papery frames not metaphors for painting's support structures but not *not* metaphors for them either)? "The things that make art and the things that art makes," she writes. It's a refrain that returns throughout. Its dry pop chorus a signal of the life — violent, ardent, social, skeptical, political, intellectual — that situates an artist and her work, then nothing, then that (teeming) life again. In the way of a hook it feels good in the mouth. Much of Koether's book does.

"To write an 'I' for the first time and to let it get out of hand right away: spreading out, dispersing, movement, essentially. That's how it all began." It's an interesting line for a book in which, essentially, the "I" — one that might be attached, however fictionally or performatively, to the author — is dispersed into a number of women characters, all artists though their practices vary: writer, painter, runner, sister. (A mirror of the disparate roles we all play in our own lives as well as Koether's famed multiplicity: painter, musician, writer, performer, New Yorker, Berliner, etc.) In her book, these characters — which seem to bleed, not unawkwardly, between the first and third person, between the critic and the artist and the character — are grouped under not an "I" but an *f.*, a title that stands as an abbreviation for both female and a father's fountain pen with which one of the characters first wrote herself into being. The symbolism here is head-on, which seems right. Power is rarely subtle; that is, men and their rote patriarchal machinations. Neither need be resistance, always.

"It's a matter of power and its objects instead of culture and its others."[1] This recent observation by Hal Foster — unrelated to Koether's practice — rhymed in my head with the mores of *f.* when I read it (like another instructive refrain). Despite the artistic figures that prompted Foster's reflection — a group of white male European modernist painters with whom any reader will be overly familiar with, no need to mention them here, really — his line seemed to more interestingly attach itself, in my mind, to Koether's novella. Despite the "others" that are her subjects — that is, woman painters — and despite the "culture" of their work, her real subject here is power and how we manifest it in the objects that constellate and punctuate our world.

In a style at once rough and beautifully inevitable, Koether shows how we imbue such objects with the world's often intangible and inexplicable meaning, and how those objects then come to stand in for the systems of relations that become the conditions for one's work.

The objects of Koether's *f.* are gendered in a strange, slant way. Their "f." is at once obvious and obscured, like masks, like a slash of red across the mouth (or the canvas). Velvet, lipstick, fountain pens, buttons, coral necklaces, curtains, red paint, canvas, money, books, fruit: each thing becomes at once fetish and a means of exchange, a sign to be written and material to be used for the practice and thinking of painting. Early in the book these objects stand as titles and subjects of her short chapters. But everything written here becomes an object in *f.* — the key of the book, were we to think sonically, as Koether often does — and is given form, strict or not, even immaterials like debt and discourse. One sees the contours of debt, the material fact of discourse. Moreover, "seeing was writing," as Koether writes, pointedly. Her objects and characters have a corporeal violence that suggest or make explicit the act of making, painting, or writing, and the act of living. They *teem* with physicality, with the social, with meaning, with *f.* They team.

Indeed, among its many pleasures, I was struck by the strange solidarity of this book — so social for a book about the (f.) mind, and the (f.) body creating something out of it. It's a polemic about painting and radical subjecthood that employs a kind of narrative, social intelligence. In doing so, Koether reveals the narrative potential of art criticism — that is, the fictional (f.) potential, the ability of writing about art to actually be writing about the world, its fabrics and aspirations and violence and needs and intelligence and economies and feminisms. Reading through some old *Flash Art* texts of Koether's after I reluctantly finished *f.*, I found glimmers of this fictional tendency: traces of life, and its embodiment in language, that seem out of place in the snuffbox of much art criticism. In a summer of 1988 "Report from the Field" for *Flash Art*, Koether wrote:

> First there were the black paintings: the works a painter simply has to paint her way through if she is truly a painter, showing no regard for herself or her public. An insistence on the physical presence of a painting, and on all the pain and sorrow connected with it. She throws herself against the power of the effectively greater cunning of the faculty of understanding and brings it as thoroughly as possible into confrontation with its opposite. One knows that everything can be said but by no means wants to paint it.[2]

It's a wonderful passage. A deft psychological portrait, as some gray literary critic might write in red in the margins. The margin here is relevant (maybe red, too): the painter is a woman, she has a name — Bettina Semmer — she is making black paintings, those dark monochromes known (still) as emissions of a certain kind of Western market masculinity and genius. Thus the power of the pronoun here, the figure of a woman artist, is a thrill. Still. As it is in *f.* And despite Semmer's reality, this passage seems

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

to shadow the very fictional pleasures of *f.* That is, the pleasure of serious and strange writing about painting — writing in which ideas of margin and center and hegemonic power and artistic ambition are metabolized and transformed in real ways — and about serious and strange women making and thinking and living critically and physically, together and apart.

Is it odd that as an art critic begins to approach fiction in her form, that I as a reader find it so much more promising and illuminating in its writing about art itself? It recalls a kind of ouroboros — the serpent that by slipping itself into its own mouth, became a palindromic-alchemical figure that so often tells the story of our world in its simple, devastating sign — and suggests, anew, the possible powers of art criticism. Not to serve the market, its banal and indefensible machinations, which include so many of the progressive political publications calling for its destruction (but not really), but to serve art in a larger sense, or in Koether's words, again: "The things that make art and the things that art makes."

During a conference in 2011 at the Frankfurt Städelschule on the "Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism," organized by Isabelle Graw (who contributed a cogent introduction to this new edition of *f.*, with Daniel Birnbaum), Koether stated that: "Coming out with a painting is coming out to go into a battle with a totally inadequate material. To shove materiality in everybody's face. There it is." She also reportedly said that if paintings do anything, they now create work for critics. I would say, though, that this book — written when she was twenty-nine in the late 1980s in Germany, in an ideological and cultural moment much removed from our present — does the opposite. Most contemporary books of fiction about visual artists are embarrassing exercises in a lack of knowledge or feeling for art on the part of the author. *f.* goes far to show that, in contrast, contemporary art as a subject for fiction, that is, as a narrative by which to explore our current social and political and economic conditions, as well as cultural, is ripe. Red, also. I keep thinking about *f.* Its meaning, its strictness, its form. There are so many f.'s, though. In Koether's critical hands, *f.* is an index of resistance: one profane and political and fictional and formal and female and feminist — and fable. The Grimm Brothers, best known for their fables (that is, our defining Western fictions, full of a colonial-patriarchal morality that does not dissipate), also wrote the first German dictionary, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, which was left unfinished at their death. They only made it to the letter, yes, *f.* Not a bad place to begin (writing anew the world).

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1 Ben Davis, "'I Drank the Apocalyptic Kool-Aid': Art Historian Hal Foster on Why He Has Developed an Unromantic View of the Avant-Garde," *Artnet.com*, March 26, 2018. Retrieved from https://news.artnet.com/art-world/hal-foster-1251083.

2 Jutta Koether, "A Report From the Field," *Flash Art – International Edition*, no. 141 (Summer 1988), p. 89.

xii

i "The Fifth Season," installation view at Bortolami, New York, 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

ii Jutta Koether, Jo Baer, Lynda Bengalis, installation view at Van Abbemuseum, Netherlands. Photography by Peter Cox. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

iii *Souveraine Nr.5 (after Peaches)*, 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 88 1/4 × 65 3/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich.

iv *JXXXA–PPR01–7*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas.15 7/8 × 19 7/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich.

v *Pique-niques (1)*, 2017. Acrylic, gels and metal, ink on canvas. 7 canvases each of 16 × 20 inches. Part 2 of 7. Courtesy of the artist and Campili Presti, London / Paris.

vi *Fiorentino Rosso Sansepolcro*, 2014. Oil on canvas. 86 5/8 × 66 7/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich.

vii *Mède*, 1992. Oil on canvas. 98.5 × 78.75 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

61

viii *Traveling Light I*, 2016. Acrylic on canvas. 14 × 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

ix *I Know There's Nothing Else To Do*, 1994. Oil on canvas. 86 × 76 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

x *One Small Painting*, 2012. Oil on canvas. 27.56 × 19.69 × 79 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.

xi "Maquis," installation view at Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich, 2014. Photography by Annik Wetter. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich.

xii *Penance*, 2013. Perspex table, liquid acrylic, selected objects. Dimensions variables. Courtesy of the artist and Arnolfini, Bristol.

xiii *Lucian David and Eli*, 2014. Oil on canvas. 149.9 × 89.9 cm; 59 × 35 1/2 in signed. Photography by Joerg Lohse. Courtesy of the artist and Reena Spaulings, New York.

Kerstin Stakemeier, Jutta Koether and Quinn Latimer
Under Female Competence
Flash Art, Volume 51, N°320, May, 2018, p.42-61.

OCTOBER

A Conversation with Jutta Koether

Benjamin Buchloh: I've seen you enact your work in public a few times, in performances at Harvard (April 2013) and in Berlin (November 2010), and the events have led me to wonder how you link painting and performance. The public performance of the act of painting had previously acquired importance only in the misguided European reception of the work of Jackson Pollock, as in the spectacularization of painting by Georges Mathieu or Yves Klein. Prior to that, painting had been blissfully protected: The very genre of easel painting, and the act of its making, had protected it from being dislodged from its place in the studio, from the canvas support, and from its surfaces.[1] And I think it was only under the impact of spectacularization, which shifts painting into an ostentatious visibility and bodily activity, that it suddenly approached the category of performativity. I see your work as posing some of these questions.

Jutta Koether: I think you're right to see it in those terms, although I would say my endeavor is not entirely that. When you do something that's both performance and painting, your undertaking cannot be an entirely critical one. Because the way you involve yourself—after all, it is a bodily experience—will always throw into doubt the dimension of criticality in and of art itself. Walking that line, so to speak, has led me into a somewhat problematic terrain; but only in that problematic terrain is it even possible to deal with the historical baggage and trajectories that painting and performance share. When I started to get involved with art-making, my primary focus was painting. I tried to find operations to pull painting into a problematized terrain where it could perform a change on its own terms, where it could develop into something that was not merely rehashed or pastiched but actively dealt with its own fucked-up history, its pleasures and pains, and formulating my own *Meditation on the Passion*.

Buchloh: That seems for me to be precisely one of the provocations of your work: When artists in the late 1960s—for example, Bruce Nauman or Vito Acconci—made a shift from sculpture to performance, they moved as far

1. For a characteristically excellent discussion of Koether's painting, among other topics, see David Joselit's "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 125–34.

OCTOBER 157, Summer 2016, pp. 15–33.

away from the tradition of the medium as possible. Nauman began with very complex sculptures, but once he got into the performativity of the process of making and viewing, sculpture for him was no longer an issue. And in a way, Acconci was even more radical in his departure from traditional genres and traditional mediums—of writing, for example; after all, he started out as a poet. And very rarely, as in Nauman's series *Art Make-Up* (1967), do they even start with painting. . . . Instead, they might deal with things that are part objects or transitional objects. Whereas, thirty years later, paradoxically, you maintain or reconstruct a bond to painting, the traditional genre that is the obverse of performance. Why do you try to resuscitate painting with those means when others are available? Why not accept painting's obsolescence or historical conclusion?

Koether: Again, the answer cannot be one-layered, because it has expanded or has been altered over time throughout my artistic practice. When I realized that making art was what I wanted to do, I discovered that everybody started through performance—that of a self becoming whatever. When I started to study in Cologne in early 1977, painting was, for many different reasons, inaccessible. I was part of a philosophically oriented seminar with a pedagogue named Peter Rech who had studied with Joseph Beuys and then had gone to Paris and studied with Jacques Lacan. I had to deal with the artists you mentioned and other performance practices, especially in the feminist arena. The experience was an eye-opener, and it helped me to see beyond the teaching itself, to see the horizon of painting precisely because of the detour.

Buchloh: Thus the teaching of Beuys was crucial, and Beuys was more important than Nauman?

Koether: Absolutely. And for a while I completely clung to the Beuys model. At the time it "saved" me.

Buchloh: I have often wondered whether one of the problems with the reception of performance art in Germany—even if they were explicitly feminist practices, like that of Ulrike Rosenbach, for example—was that it completely misunderstood what American artists were doing. There was something deeply troubling about the reception because it did not reflect at all on where the practice came from. It was just an adaptation of something that had nothing to do with the experience of that particular history.

Koether: I've always been interested in the potentials of misunderstandings. Sure, as a young artist I looked at Rosenbach's work, as well as at the feminist bookshop and its School for Creative Feminism and related activities in Cologne at that moment, but they were really not an option for me generationally. Only a few years separated us, but it was a significant difference, so I had to leave all that behind to find my coordinates as an artist on my own. I totally "abandoned" the German cultural sphere and developed a kind of structural sense of disobedience for avoiding the ruts of the patriarchal models still dominant in schools, in the art world, even in activism. Or at least I considered them as

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

not enough, as already stifled. . . . I kept asking, Why must feminist art practice perform "otherness" in an "other" medium? Why not in painting? Painting stayed on my mind and eventually led me to the US, where I turned toward other interests and other models, shifting from Beuys to Warhol in the very late 1970s, early '80s. At some point in the '80s, with the arrival of my first red paintings, I realized, *My mind is painted* (this process can be traced in my books *20 minutes* and *f,* republished with Sternberg Press in 2015). All this happened before I left for New York.

Buchloh: When did you go to the United States for the first time?

Koether: In 1987, much later than most of my peers, because I was not interested in *being* there. That is, it wasn't about having that experience. I kept a distance from my own desire to "escape," or to do adventure trips, but I also developed a practice of strategic distancing toward the ground where I came from. In order also to learn how to position and reposition myself in unexpected terrain and in unexpected ways. I was in this weird other mental place and was trying to find new coordinates.

Buchloh: But at the same time, I could ask the question: Why not from Beuys to Richter or Polke? If you were so deeply devoted to painting, wouldn't that have been a much more obvious choice than Warhol?

Koether: Well, despite their highly intelligent and influential critical strategies, Richter and Polke still represented the continuation of an old order and therefore had no attraction for the subject formation of a female painter. But also because while I was still at university, I thought about doing a Ph.D. The subject I had in mind was Antonin Artaud, and I got really interested in his work and then also in the work of Wols and Fautrier. And all the French, existentialist-oriented modes of painting. Self-tortures indeed! Fragmented creatures who chose painting to perform their existence with/on. My thinking was rerouted through that.

Buchloh: How can one make the jump from Artaud to Warhol?

Koether: I think it has something to do with the urge to open up worlds . . . and a certain playfulness. I skipped Richter because he didn't have, for me, the humor, nor the anger, nor the madness. Ultimately, I did get interested in Polke. But what was most important in all my choices is that the models I preferred to look at shared the idea that a painting *is* the world for an artist. I was looking for a way to reconfigure the terms of understanding how to participate in that while being interested in all the motions of the mind that feed into that world-building. And Polke had attempted quite a bit of exploring in that field.

Buchloh: There was not much room for feminist thinking in his attitude.

Koether: That's what I mean. Not only in his attitude but also the whole entourage. . . . Later I encountered similar things with Kippenberger, but then I could take it or counteract it or deal with it much better because it was somehow more porous. The humor is not as biting and humiliating. Also, by

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

that time I had a position that was not solely rooted in art but that was rooted in my activity at *Spex,* which made it more difficult for me to enter the art world, but on the other hand I was not being judged, being pushed around, in any way. I could always return to that other place and say "fuck you" to those in the art scene.

Buchloh: So one of the many challenges you faced at that time was finding a way to avoid direct confrontation with the art world, which led you to identify with the newly emerging sphere of New Wave and punk culture?

Koether: Yes. I was already involved in that scene before I began as an artist. In 1977, when it all started in England, I went there all the time to see the shows. My friends and I did translations, published zines, and distributed little proto-punk collages, DIY style. We were learning to stretch and flex and imagine, to wander and improvise, to become an artist outside the academic system. Then I imported that experience to painting, literally to the canvas.

Buchloh: Which, of course, is simultaneously slightly tragic and comical because it is yet another version of a cultural importation, isn't it? It is one of the conflicts that different German generations had to contend with again and again. So you go from Joseph Beuys to the Sex Pistols. To solve a problem that cannot be solved that way.

Koether: True. But there is a little bit of progress, if we can talk about progress in this at all. First of all, because punk rock almost instantaneously became a German thing (or at least a version of that occurred in Neue Deutsche Welle). It was Germans' first encounter with the onset of global culture. But it also introduced something ludic . . . and opened up space to format something like Poussin's "Arcadian ways," a certain lightness of the mind. And there was an American aspect that tied it back to the Warholian sphere. The other element that was critical for my formation was the anarchist motto of punk culture: Do it yourself. Whatever it is that you do, you are in charge, you are a member of a community—and equally. Men, women—they all looked the same for a certain moment. I don't want to idealize, but at the emergence of punk, men and women were equally active.

Buchloh: The Sex Pistols were not exactly very feminist.

Koether: No, but there were the X-Ray Spex, the Slits, Julie Burchill. . . . There were all kinds of (feminist) models who intelligently embraced contradictions, malfunctions, past and future ideas of empowerment, of freedom.

Buchloh: Even the Velvet Underground was a manifestly mixed group.

Koether: Yes, that's what I mean. Warhol and the Warholian sphere served as a blueprint of sorts. But at the same time I knew I was way too late for that. I was born in 1958, so I could not live in that world, only recognize its patina. But it was interesting to learn from this and participate in building a small platform for myself through it.

Buchloh: When did *Spex* magazine begin? And when did you join?

Koether: It was founded in late 1980, and I joined in January 1981. My first proper longer piece was about Nico.

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Buchloh: Who was also from Cologne.

Koether: She was a *huge* hero of mine. When I did this interview with her, it provided an important lesson. Because she was so fucked up. It was the first time I experienced how an artistic mind had been destroyed by drugs and fame, and I realized it's fascinating but exactly what to avoid. I knew I wanted to do something like that, I wanted to have all of *this*, but not at that price. It taught me I would have to find a method that made me stronger in other ways, so I could do this. I kept thinking, Man, this is so sobering. It stuck with me for months. And then I saw her again a few years later in London after a concert, and she was even worse. It was so sad. I tried to follow what she was doing, but she was sinking tragically. The interactions—this whole notion of a woman alone who put everything on the line to be so radical—were also influential in terms of my performance.

Buchloh: But why did you cathect on Nico, and not on Simone Forti, or Yvonne Rainer, for example?

Koether: Well, I guess it had to be Nico because she was connected to music and from Germany, so she had that tragic cultural background; she was closer to me in that sense. Also, I didn't know anybody who would have told me about Forti or Rainer.

Buchloh: These are the two tracks that seem to pose rather complex challenges for the postwar generations in Germany: One of them is the fascination with American avant-garde and mass cultural practices from Warhol to the Velvet Underground, and the increasing identification with all that they could stand for, particularly when pretending to offer oppositional, radical forms. The other track confronts German history and its artistic legacies, like those of Beuys and Polke. In a way, these two tracks have nothing, or very little, to do with each other, so how can you reconcile them? I think your generation might have brought the tracks closer together than the previous one, but the question of how to reconcile them remains interesting, and the answers could probably explain some of the contradictions in your work, such as the puzzling simultaneity of painting and performance.

Koether: I think it has to do with the German legacy in particular. You cannot avoid recognizing at some point that you cannot escape that history and that the notion of reconciliation isn't really an option. I tried to escape and at first I refused to deal with any of it. But when I was finally in America—I visited New York first in 1987, but I started living there only in 1991—I became more and more aware of how important it was for me to deal with this. I made a point out of entering *with painting*.

Buchloh: Nineteen ninety-one was the end of Neo-Expressionism, wasn't it? Or the end of the return to painting?

Koether: Totally. That's why it felt like a good moment to step in and really fight for it. I was making use of it and also *attending* to it. It was not meant as a heroic act in any way, but there was a slightly exhilarating energy that emerged from the feeling of starting something from scratch.

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Buchloh: Why? If you were so against it, were you also a kind of anti-painter?

Koether: Yes, but painting was part of my history. It's how I was educated. It's what I looked at. Deep down, that's how you start.

Buchloh: Did you learn the skills of painting? And then the de-skilling of painting?

Koether: I had studied to become an art teacher, so I had to have a certain amount of skill. I also had some skill from my mother's teachings, and I was close friends with some of the painters in Cologne, I got some information about techniques and so on from them. . . . I used that moment in Cologne in the mid- to late '70s to redefine what I could and wanted to do. Not much interest in painting there. So I thought, Why not use that neglect in a positive way? I also started looking at American painters who had tried to enter the history of painting from the "outside," painters like Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Agnes Martin, Man Ray . . .

Buchloh: But your response to painting was not necessarily to resurrect it. Was there no attempt to redeem painting?

Koether: Yes and no. Redeeming was certainly not on my agenda. I never looked at painting as some masterful thing one would want to reinstall, but instead as a platform, a potential, an island, a lifeboat, a discipline to negotiate life . . . a performance. An attempt at something impossible, a reinvention of painting through painting. I wanted to make it a temporary site, which I took literally. There was this large painting I made in 1992 called *Inside Job*. It was a work that I made in New York before I showed in a gallery. I placed the painting in an apartment on the floor and invited people to view it. It was part of a show that Eric Oppenheim had organized and it was called *The Real Thing*. It was a group show but it happened in the artists' studios, and Oppenheim was supposed to bring people by. Which he never did. But I used it as a frame for experimenting with my own thing and inviting guests/visitors myself. I had these small rooms: one with a painting on the floor, the other with a desk. I asked people one-on-one to come and look at the painting in progress, and then to sit with me and speak about the experience of seeing the painting. With the painting came a book—a "manual," I called it—that had all the drawings and visual trajectories of what I was involved in. It was also an emerging social sketchbook, which meant I made reports of each session every night.

Buchloh: You selected the people you invited? Or you did it with whoever came?

Koether: It was a mixed group. You had to make an appointment, like a doctor's office.

Buchloh: I was about to say it was like an analyst's appointment. Even though it's not clear who was the patient and who was the analyst.

Koether: Yes. I didn't record it because I didn't know most of the people well enough. I made occasional handwritten notes, aide-mémoire, shorthand. . . . After the departure of the visitor I typed a report into an electric typewriter, and the report sheet entered the public manual so that the people who came the next day could read it.

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Buchloh: Were the people identified in the report sheet: This person said *this*, this person said *that*...?

Koether: Yes. I later published the typewritten book as *J.K.: The Inside Job* [1993].

Buchloh: Does the book still exist?

Koether: The book has been digitized. The complete project, titled *The Bigger Splash*, was just shown as part of the *Painting and Performance* exhibition at Tate Modern; it attempted to trace a history of painting and performance positions. They digitized the book and all the drawings, and they were all shown with an installation of the actual painting presented on a very large pane of glass.

Buchloh: Would you say this was the first time that your painting and performance came together?

Koether: It was the first time the combination was a conscious artwork. I wanted to expose my idea of painting to people without just dragging them to my studio. I wanted to try another way, to involve them in a performance that I had set up.

Buchloh: Your description of *Inside Job* helped me just now to understand an additional aspect of your work, namely, that looking at a painting becomes a manifestly dialogic relationship, almost like an analytical session. And you bring this dialogic relationship between spectator and author and space and institution much more into focus by turning the painting into a performance. Still the question remains: Why does painting persist even in that situation? You mentioned earlier that you had been thinking about German Dada, which of course is crucial for another set of questions. Because nobody in the immediate postwar moment reflected on that history, right? And if they did reflect on pre-Fascist history, it was Expressionism, not German Dadaism. That came much later, in the 1960s.

Koether: Right, it was later, with someone like Polke, who opened up that possibility of reflecting-on-while-painting. But with that there was also a return to the bohemian/anarchist/negotiator/life-experimenter model of the artist.

Buchloh: Up to the moment when you referenced punk culture, I could have made the case that you should have become an artist in the lineage of John Cage and moved on into Fluxus, because that's exactly what you just described. The lineage you constructed clearly leads from object-making to performative operations, a lineage that is strongly related to the historical trajectory from Cage to George Brecht and from Fluxus to Robert Filliou, for example. Yet that seems to be completely absent from your work. From the logic of your arguments and what you say about music, however, it would have been perfectly plausible to go there.

Koether: Yeah, but I wasn't born like John Cage and did not attend Black Mountain College!

Buchloh: But you were living in Cologne, where George Brecht worked, for example. There was a very strong presence of Fluxus in Düsseldorf and Cologne.

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Koether: Sure, but punk rock didn't want "fathers" . . . perhaps only strange/multiple ones like the Situationists.

Buchloh: For some reason your attraction to mass cultural and subcultural formations caused you to bypass the Dada legacy, which is fascinating. It is as if you said, "I cannot identify with this type of high-cultural subversion because it's the generation of the fathers that was done by Stockhausen in Cologne."

Koether: I know, but what I think you don't understand is that my generation—or maybe I should only speak for myself—*lost*, or rather *refused*, this kind of connection to thinking in a linear trajectory. We—I—experienced it as the second-order culture, as having been or always being the one behind, always the "born too late," always the inheritor *of* . . .

Buchloh: Due to what? Being German? Being of your generation? Or being a woman?

Koether: All of those things. I always felt strongly that I could only understand it through reflection with others in the same situation, which at the time for me was *Spex*, people like Diedrich Diederichsen. In order to articulate your own subjectivity, you didn't find a method but constructed it yourself. All the other trajectories—like that of the Expressionist painter-performer—were already being clogged by other guys with other attitudes. I knew all those people, but for me they represented just another impasse as structurally they followed an Oedipal schematic. Just another lineage to be stuck in. Only this pseudo-global, new thing—punk rock—provided at the time the attitude that you could do things you weren't supposed to do, to allow anger, playful display, and enactments of provocative harshness. Communicate. Speak up. Become active. DIY aesthetics and their inevitable fate of becoming marketable lifestyles were a rather interesting firsthand experience of how to have and lose beliefs, life dialectics! . . . It also helped to step outside of oneself, to identify things that I had inherited, to be able to analyze them, as well as really find other locations for/of cultural activity outside of the given social structures (school, academy, art scene). Punk-rock culture also encouraged language. The act of finding one's voice of refusal, resistance *and* enjoyment. A kind of ersatz Dada.

Buchloh: Your own terrain in terms of history, in terms of technique, in terms of medium, in terms of praxis?

Koether: I'm not sure how to describe it. At the time, I thought of painting as an abandoned building.

Buchloh: When you say it was like an abandoned building already in 1991, was it a space in which certain mnemonic capacities were preserved, in which a dimension of cultural memory attracted you? It seems for me an incredibly important aspect.

Koether: It was and it wasn't. It was an intuitive thing, semiconscious. I said, If the building is abandoned, I'm still here tinkering away. Like a weird squatter. And I thought that type of tinkering could open up a thinking space that has

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

a certain freedom. It allows you to reach out to those dimensions that are otherwise barred. There are certain components, certain elements, that return. Sometimes they're symbols, sometimes colors. At one point, for example, I learned everything about red; I had paintings with twenty different reds. There is an inner necessity for me that means some things keep returning. But I always do what I think is necessary for each project: making felt that psychic site that a painting constitutes.

Buchloh: Let's go back to another context question: The anti-aesthetic impulse in painting—which obviously has a very long and complicated history, from Picabia to Polke to Kippenberger—is part of your horizon in many differentiated ways. Would there not be an important difference between an anti-pictorial, anti-aesthetic operation by a woman and an anti-pictorial operation by a man?

Koether: I think there is a difference between Kippenberger and others insofar as Kippenberger provided one of those rare moments in the culture of male German artists when an artist was actually willing and able to say what the problem is. I appreciated that. Despite his performances of very bad jokes at times, Kippenberger was not a cynic. I would not have been willing to listen to him if I had felt that, because the specific type of anti-aesthetic painting that I'm interested in is not a negative one. Perhaps there is a difference between an anti-pictorial operation by a woman and one by a man, and I think it has something to do with socialization and, for me, the conditions under which I learned painting and what my points of orientation were. The way I explored painting had much more to do with *content*, with what these paintings represented. So I delved into queer painting and into women painters—

Buchloh: What did you consider queer painting?

Koether: Marsden Hartley, Pavel Tchelitchew, Georgia O'Keeffe: really "forbidden" stuff at the time. In Germany in the early '80s, if you mentioned one of those artists, it was dismissed as kitsch. Their works fell between all categories. Also Bacon, Freud, Balthus, Klossowski. Those latter ones have been constant companions in thinking through painting, learning fearlessness through their application of anachronisms. In the late '80s in New York I met more people and learned a lot. John Miller, for instance, introduced me really early on to artists like Jack Goldstein. I thought his position was sort of weird—I mean, his wasn't "queer painting," but nobody could really *read* his work. It fell between kitsch and . . . I'm not sure. I knew John Miller because we were both writers for *Artscribe*. He was the only other writer for *Artscribe* who described himself as "artist and writer." I always got dissed for being an artist and writer in Germany, so I wrote him a letter. We were pen pals, and he was the first artist I met in New York in 1987. And that led back to performance positions, of course. You start with Florine Stettheimer and you end up somewhere with Jack Smith and Mike Kelley.

Buchloh: It is very interesting for me to understand the eccentricity of your interest in Stettheimer and Smith, rather than, say, Eva Hesse. I say this with the greatest respect, so please don't misunderstand me.

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Koether: Of course I knew about Hesse too. I knew about her before I moved to New York. I remember on my first trip I brought back a big stack of books from the Strand. Georgia O'Keeffe, the Lucy Lippard book on Eva Hesse, and the *Eccentric Abstraction* catalogue. I thought, Wow, that's a great title. Let's see what it is about.

Buchloh: Stettheimer, O'Keeffe, and Hesse don't go very easily together, do they?

Koether: Depends on what you mean by "going together." They did for me! It's funny, because the connection was thematized many years later in a book by Anne Wagner . . .

Buchloh: Right, *Three Artists Three Women.*

Koether: . . . where she discussed Eva Hesse, Lee Krasner, and Georgia O'Keeffe. I think part of the attraction for me was looking for a female model. Not that I wanted to identify entirely with that. But I could clearly see parallels in the ways they had the same urge to take their own bodies and put themselves out there and pose with their work. To be, in a way, female . . . entities. They had an odd relation to their paintings and how they presented their lives to a public. I found that kind of irritating, confusing, and also interesting.

Buchloh: What about Agnes Martin?

Koether: Agnes Martin was of the greatest importance for me. I discovered her when I was only sixteen or seventeen. On my own. I saw a show in Holland, and I was blown away. I had traveled to Amsterdam wanting to see as many Van Goghs as possible, and I saw Agnes Martin! Well, I saw both. There you see my formation, how things can coexist and interact in all kinds of ways. I also saw the Pollock that they have at the Stedelijk. Those trips were *really* important, when I was young with the desire to find things, and all of a sudden you find things that are incredible.

Buchloh: Do you have a problem reconciling all these disparate elements? Or do you see them as continuing to be operative in your life and in your work, and while being detached from each other, don't they simultaneously define what you do and how you do it?

Koether: It's like other things in life, you know? I mean, they are there, some of them have been constitutive elements and others are sort of . . . . It's like in a study gallery where you have the important parts—the masterpieces—and then you have these other elements that are as crucial as the rest in order to let the whole thing live. I feel it is the same for what I call my coordinates or my points of reference. I don't need to reconcile them. They are there . . . just like my "Bruised Grids." It's just that some come to the forefront sometimes more strongly. Or others have been in the background forever and will probably stay there forever. It has to do with the way you conceive of your own body of work, or what it is that you actually want to do or what you want to leave behind. One other term that I wanted to propose is what you at one point called "eccentric"—this kind of travel through very dissimilar figures that one cannot reconcile, or that for you can't be reconciled. Like when you said: In my world, Duchamp and Georgia O'Keeffe can't operate together,

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

it's impossible . . . I answered in a funny way, as though I retreated again when I said: "Oh, it's organic," or whatever. And it is organic, partially, but it was also done very much by design. It was both a necessity and a decision to create something that is really, in a way, about dissonance. The project is not just to encounter dissonance but also to enjoy it and upload it positively.

Buchloh: This is the first time you have used the concept of dissonance, and it seems strikingly central to your work at large . . .

Koether: Because we were also talking about this pain factor. That there is something painful about dissonance. And despite all the dialectics, there is something in one's desire that wants to be reconciled and wants to be put into a logic or find some kind of closure. It's either a sentimental closure or it's a logical closure. From the very beginning, I have always understood my project as being an alternative to all that enjoyment of dissonance.

Buchloh: Is that also because it is a feminist project?

Koether: Yes, because it is a feminist project, and because I arrived historically at a time when there was no fixed or stable or clear situation—there was nothing that could really pose as a credible authority or a fixed path. Just this kind of thirst. Like, to always let go and think and read and learn more. I feel that art, for me, is whatever medium you use—that's what it's about. Even if there is nothing for a year. Or if one doesn't create masterpieces or something like that. I feel that is not important. An aesthetic openness *is* important. So I try to do things that allow me to present these thoughts directly, in multilayered ways.

Buchloh: The performance you did at Harvard was incredibly important for me in many ways. But it had a distinctly tragic quality about it, and I'm not sure whether or not that was intended. Because you were making grand claims. . . . I mean, it's not exactly a very probable step for an artist of your generation to establish a relationship with Poussin. Secondly, it's not exactly a probable phenomenon—certainly not in the United States—for an artist to step onstage and explain to us the seven sacraments. And thirdly, for the artist then to channel this through a very complicated and elaborate-looking computer-aided mediation. Those three elements—and there were many others, of course—already generated a very complex situation which I experienced almost as painful, as tragic. It was like this tragic struggle to figure out how one can possibly think about these things simultaneously. Is that somewhat accurate as a description?

Koether: Yes, absolutely.

Buchloh: And, again, the work compelled the question, What is it that you're trying to rescue, if anything at all, when you know very well that you cannot rescue it? Or, what is it that you're trying to reestablish as a mnemonic dimension in your work when you point us to Poussin? Or when you point us ethically to the seven sacraments? These fundamentally strong gestures are so potentially dangerous as gestures of restoration of a kind of experience that is long lost,

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

never to be restored, and even though you know this, you make them anyway—because otherwise it would be unbearable. So the tragic dimension of the performance was very striking. But do you see it in those terms, as a melancholic resuscitation?

Koether: Oh, yes, very much so. Yet there is also an internal challenge to put oneself in a kind of "danger," being *very* exposed, that is. Laying out the entire mind-sketch in a raw, vulnerable manner. These are modes of undoing, notating, transcribing, thinning, and so on—historical baggage, layers of interpretations. In that sense, both performance gestures (dance moves, citations, music) as well as painting and drawing gestures. And also to make it clear that this particular condition is constitutive. There is simultaneously loss and gain. And I feel that past works, like those of Poussin, enable me to open a window, a stage, for that moment and invite me on a non-immersive cruise into the past.

Buchloh: At the same time you present it with a grotesque comical introduction.

Koether: Yes! Of course. I use every possible thing in the effects box to enhance this notion. (Here I'd like to mention T. J. Clark, because I learned a certain humor and daring from him. . . . Look at his Poussin book, subtitled "An Experiment in Writing.") That's also why I developed a structure for the performance where I sort of introduce it with this other voice. It's almost like a ventriloquist moment. Do you remember the music element? At one point the rendering of the image crashed and I just blasted music for a very short while. The music is from Scott Walker, an American musician living in the UK—he was part of the Walker Brothers—that I do not necessarily identify with, but his presentation of music has a similar experimental comic/grotesque/melancholic dimension. At the end of the day I always try to incorporate a little bit of this other lineage: my becoming an artist through music culture. It's important not to leave those things outside just because I'm, say, at Harvard at a painting conference.

Buchloh: Was the piece conceived specifically for Harvard as a performance? Would you repeat it?

Koether: Not in that form. It was an "experiment in a (lecture) performance" custom-made for the occasion.

Buchloh: But you would talk about Poussin and the seven sacraments again in a different setting?

Koether: Yes, but the Harvard event, that particular stage and that environment, was unique; I *wouldn't* want to do that somewhere else. It was very good. You cannot repeat that. But I did do something related within the setting of my show at Dundee Contemporary Arts in Scotland titled *Seasons and Sacraments*.

Buchloh: Let's talk about the *Seasons* paintings a bit more. . . . There is this prismatic duality in your work of keeping painting in the game, so to speak, when in fact you are perpetually dismantling it. At the same time, you buttress it even more by reconnecting painting to its most heroic moments in history. How

can an artist like you—at this moment and within your generation—position herself in relation to Poussin? In a way, you seem to be asking how historical memory can be articulated in the present with the means that are at your disposal. And the means at your disposal seem to be largely annihilated or criticized by yourself. Because you're not a *painter*-painter, in a sense.

Koether: I think what you're describing is precisely—and maybe it's my fantasy—where I find the figure of Poussin. Because he is at the pinnacle of so-called classical painting and at the same time he made a certain kind of painting impossible. Maybe it's only my projection, but I find it fascinating how his practice can be so clear and so firm but at the same time it can undermine his own project as a whole. I like Poussin's displacement, his identity as a French classical painter who nonetheless lives in Rome most of his artistic life. There's also the coexistence of passion and concepts of freedom of "learning by doing" as well as of introducing vehement changes in the way one works. As for the *Seasons,* I did three versions. The first one is the "original," and that is the set that is closest to Poussin's. It follows the proportions, the dimensions, the color schemes, and the compositional devices of Poussin's actual paintings. The second set is tweaked to the needs of the gallery. The format is a bit smaller; the color is a bit different in order to match the whole space. I have a Florentine red that I used very heavily in those. The paintings have all kinds of colors, but that specific red color of the ground I also used in the paintings themselves. Mussini Florentine Red! It almost looked like the paintings had been sprayed with red gravel, as if they had soaked it up and were weirdly "illuminated" through the ground, since they had this strange red underpainting. They looked inflamed. The third set of *Seasons* came as a small version, painted on wood panels, with elements of assemblage relating to the themes of the seasons and coated with "liquid glass," a kind of clear resin. The entire thing was hung on a piece of glass that was stuck in a concrete base and presented as an art-fair booth. It was shown with Reena Spaulings in 2012 at the first Frieze Art Fair in New York. The concrete footing was a self-made version of Lina Bo Bardi's painting stands or glass easels. Bo Bardi was an Italian Brutalist architect who moved to Brazil. She had invented these display stands for the museum in São Paulo, and in her most notorious, claim-to-fame exhibition, she put the entire collection of the Brazilian Art Museum on glass panels with concrete feet to hold the glass. And the people in São Paulo couldn't deal with it! They dismantled the whole thing after a couple of years. Of course now, over the past ten years, she has become a cult figure among artists. I really like her ideas and the way she dealt with art and architecture being intertwined in this specific way. I also like the way she used glass and concrete and cheap, common building materials like gravel and wood. (In the meantime there is a new director at the museum in São Paulo who actually REINSTALLED Bo Bardi's glass easels!)

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Buchloh: Returning to Poussin, do you know why you chose him as your historical reference figure? I mean, among the many equally important figures from the history of painting that one could have chosen, why him? Isn't that unusual for a painter of your generation?

Koether: No, it's not unusual, not if a painter is interested in space and time travel, as we talked about before. It comes from a kind of mental traveling, an ongoing search, because you don't have a fixed historical vision. So you try to find your own genealogy. I basically put myself on the same path as other partially self-taught artists. And the Poussin idea was there long before I read the T. J. Clark book. Of course, it goes through Cézanne, Balthus . . . and deep down there is always Piero della Francesca. And before that Egyptian art. And so on.

Buchloh: I was just about to say that it is like Jasper Johns returning to Cézanne in the 1950s. But you go two, three hundred years back. Why are you going so much further back than others in modernism or contemporary art have dared?

Koether: Because it's a *freer* place.

Buchloh: Duchamp went as far back as celebrating Seurat; that was his historical span. He never spoke much about Manet, for example. And certainly not about Poussin. It's an interesting question: Why does a painter of your generation open up the historical horizon that far? Rather than talking about a high-modernist artist from the late nineteenth century or from the 1920s? That would seem to be more plausible. You could have chosen Sophie Taeuber-Arp, for example.

Koether: But it is one's own paintings that have to take the lead. It cannot be a purely conceptual connection but has to come from something that feels like one's own logic. I did learn about the history of female artists, for example, and yes, a lot of reevaluations and discoveries have been made in the past thirty years or so. But I have been there already. I mean, I have been traveling for so many years, in so many places. And I also have been kind of dissatisfied—as if it's too easy. "Too easy" means that there have been too many people who have already installed their readings and their projections and their legitimations there. . . . It's sort of polluted, in a way.

Buchloh: Are you saying that historical memory itself is polluted? In the context of modernism, at least, and what people have done with it? Are you saying that artistic references within the twentieth century—or artistic references in the history of modernism—have been overused in a way that is no longer productive or relevant? Is this one of the reasons you went all the way back to Poussin?

Koether: Well, I don't trust "historical memories," although they can be stimulating . . . so that's one reason. Another was that I got interested in traversing a realm that was so layered in the scholarship, and I gave myself the task of plowing through that scholarship because I really wanted to *learn* something. I wanted the learning process to be very intense. I didn't want it to be journalistic, with a reference picked up here and there. I wanted to investigate something very deeply, as an exercise for myself. That was one attraction. I

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

think the other element (and it comes up in Clark's book, and Anthony Blunt writes a lot about it, too) is the idea that in Poussin there is a coexistence of rigidity, almost like an architectonic structure, and another kind of material—emotional inserts—that you can't account for. Whether they happen through specific figures or through the narrative of the story, they are a certain rendering: for example, this extremely weird rendering of the leaves and nature or the so-called natural world. On the one hand, Poussin has structure, but it's so tiny it's almost pointillism, and it nearly falls apart, so there's a contradictory dissonance produced. A sensation. A space for thinking and feeling.

Buchloh: What's on the other side of that extraordinary adventure into the history of painting is neoclassical painting of the grandest ambition. But your execution is a very different type of painting. Your practice of painting is difficult to grasp for people who are not totally familiar with you and your history and your understanding of it, right?

Koether: I guess so. But isn't that the case with every painter? When in doubt, I return to the Poussin self-portrait in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin and look him in the eye. It's like going to see a doctor. Besides, to be "understood" all the time is not my primary goal. I think I would rather continue my own "Koether: An experiment in painting."

Buchloh: There's an anti-aesthetic operation in your painting that is very violent. It's *as* violent as Frank Stella's *Black Paintings* were in 1958. It doesn't look like anything we've known. It doesn't establish any connection with recent painterly culture as we know it. In your case, for example, one would imagine, since you are coming from Germany, you must have *some* background in German painting of the 1960s. Polke and Richter, for example. But when one looks at the painting, it looks like neither. It doesn't even look as though you knew of them.

Koether: Ah, that's good. I wanted to perform that: a kind of willful forgetting. An act of disobedience to that pre-scripted trajectory, maybe, so that I can be free to reengage it on my terms, which I have started to do in the past few years—in my shows at Bortolami in 2012 and Reena Spaulings in 2013, for example—but simultaneously with a reengagement with the idea of the figuration in Balthus, Bacon, and most of all Lucian Freud. But I can see what you're saying. There is potentially the violence of strangeness and inconsistency.

Buchloh: There is a certain radicality in your painterly execution that interests me. Your work is unlike Kippenberger's, for example: His attempts at dislodging Richter are very easy to follow, his dialogue with Polke is easy to follow, in his work there is always a jocular dialogue, in many ways, in many structures, in many textures. One can almost always say, Oh, now he's looking at *this* and he's coming out of *this* and he's trying to deal with *this*—successfully or not is another question. There's a contextual fabric that you can read. Whether or not that's the most important aspect is another matter, but you can read the

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

work in these terms. When I see work of yours, however, I don't see any of this, and I find that much more challenging.

Koether: My work isn't readable in that way. I always feel connected not to this or that painter but to a certain idea of painting. And to a shared search for a certain intensity or a certain . . . language. Whatever helps me to find that language and articulate it, I grab. I call it "multi-morbid painting" sometimes.

Buchloh: That is so striking, because you don't seem to have a specific context; there's neither a local nor a regional nor a national context. You seem to have completely disavowed such a thing. Yet on the other hand, you construct this *huge* historical context for yourself, saying, in effect, *I'm going all the way to the seventeenth century*. That is a very strange gesture and a very strange move, isn't it?

Koether: Yes, that's true. Strangeness is good. Very good. Strangeness and beauty.

Buchloh: Perhaps a figure I can compare it to is Broodthaers? I'm not sure if that's helpful, but he did something very similar by being completely anti-aesthetic in his operations and completely allegorical in annihilating the credibility of painting. All while insisting on the necessity of continuing to paint. And insisting, moreover, on the necessity of recognizing what painting once had been and what it had stood for and what it represented. He went beyond the nineteenth century as well. He didn't go as far as Poussin, but he certainly went to Ingres and into the late eighteenth century. And in a similarly constructed, contradictory manner, insofar as what he was actually doing looked, at many moments, like the most inept approach to painting that you could possibly practice. Or it was technically mediated so it was printed. Yet the historical references were always to painting, which is a strange structure, one that hasn't been understood in Broodthaers at all, at least from what I know in the literature. The structure, as I keep saying, is mnemonic, asking: What is the legacy, what is the impact, what is the accessibility, for me as a painter in the present moment? If I look at this, how do I have access to this? But then it becomes a more general question, which makes it aesthetically relevant: How does *anyone* have access to that history at this moment? That's what I find interesting about your work.

Koether: One has to experiment with one's own methods. I draw, and redraw, red lines, red threads, through something. Red horizons reaching into the seventeenth century or other time zones. I would like to think Marcel Broodthaers and Lucian Freud in one space. To not lose that ability to transfer yourself imaginatively, to rehearse imagination, to notate, stimulate, activate. With those plays of lines and color suggesting the motions of the mind celebrating with garlands the fact that we still do not know where *Bewusstsein*, or consciousness, occurs in the human brain.

Buchloh: It has become clear in the course of our conversation that there is something vastly and fundamentally different in your approach from that of other artists, which is that you do not accept what almost everybody in Germany in

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

the previous generations has accepted—and what almost everyone in America that I can think of has accepted—namely, a relatively circumscribed set of references. When I see your paintings—*The Seasons*, for example—I say: What is her painterly gesture? What is her facture? Where does this come from? What type of drawing is this? But the painting never registers or resolves itself in such a way where I could answer the question with something like, "This is an inversion of Sol LeWitt." It sometimes looks as though random processes are very important to you, but the work isn't automatist, it isn't determined by chance operations, but it's also not excessively controlled. Or is it?

Koether: *The Seasons* are actually fairly controlled. I studied the original paintings at the Louvre very carefully. The compositional field is pretty much built in the same way, down to the centimeter. Only I tried to reverse the ratio, so that instead of having, say, 90 percent pictorial structure combined with these minor emotional inserts making up only 5 percent, almost like particles, it was the other way around. So there you have a fixed structure. And then there are these other additional, ridiculous structures, pseudo-structures that *I* invented . . . so the composition is set. The figures in the paintings were kept, but I made them much bigger in scale, and so on. The color scheme is the same as in the originals, but amplified. For instance, Poussin's *Winter* has darkened enormously. It was always dark—winter is not depicted as a happy, snowy landscape but as a deluge, the apocalyptic dark night of the storm—and I rendered it with this weird black wheel in the middle of the painting, spilling out from or cracking the surface of the painting.

Buchloh: What about *The Sacraments*?

Koether: *The Sacraments* were more than actual paintings. The only two paintings in the group were related to the sacrament of marriage, which I rendered as a double painting (two panels hung one above the other, which became the central piece in the "*parcours*"). The rest of the piece was installation and sculpture, and I found that to be much easier for people to deal with. Of course, this question came up too: Why Poussin? Why something like the sacraments? Why do that now, and who cares for Christianity? There was one very direct link: The second (and complete) set of *The Sacraments* is on view at the National Gallery in Edinburgh. Another reason to choose the sacraments as a topic was that they were done twice. There was also the potential for something else, starting from Poussin's famous remark that he wanted to redo the sacraments in a profane version in which seven stories on the "fortunes of man" would replace the episodes of Christianity (which Poussin already had transposed into the "fictional" setting of ancient Roman times. I would like to point out an odd lineage here between the letter *E* showcased on the column in the sacrament of ordination and Broodthaers's *E* painting!)

Buchloh: What happened when you did the performance at Dundee Contemporary Arts in Bristol?

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

Koether: The exhibition was a performance of objects and paintings reflecting on different ways of paintings becoming, so the performance for the exhibition was a performance about the becoming of a performance becoming painting: a meta-performance. (Those stories/histories are the "models" for my painting; instead of having an actual sitter, I have those procedures, readings, searches as sitters!) First there was an introductory speech. And I had a print at the beginning of the show that I thought of as an opening act, so to speak. It was a multilayered print of a photo of a queen on her horse, kind of perforated so that it looked damaged but also stately at the same time. That led into the tour of *The Sacraments*. I performed different things. One performance was like a show-and-tell; another was more like a staged walk-through, the way a proper tour guide would do it. There was a melancholic, mute performance in which I stood in front of the piece with this light, and one where I played music for "Penance."

Buchloh: Recorded music?

Koether: No, I played my own sounds and melodic fragments on a small synthesizer. Throughout the performance I had five people helping the audience, reshuffling them, like crowd control. They held black planks, which came from the sculpture of the seventh sacrament, "Last Rites," and while I was performing they took the sculpture apart and placed all the planks throughout the space, kind of remapping the space of the sacraments. Finally, they put it back together in the shape of a 7. I wanted the artworks to do the job; instead of animating them, I wanted them to be self-explanatory . . . and outside of myself.

Buchloh: As you were describing that, I was reminded of the performance at Harvard, in which the performance was similarly structured for an audience that, it is presumed, is thinking very much along the lines of what you're doing and thinking about. It's not a confrontational approach. At first I thought, What is she doing? But once I let that go, I felt that this is exactly the kind of question one has to ask right now. There are many questions, obviously, posed by your work, but one important one is: What kind of access do I have to the historical dimension of painting? How can it be mediated—if at all? How can it be perceived—if at all? And what can you do as a painter to establish that dialogue? I'm not sure how you would want to phrase it or if you would accept that as a description.

Koether: Oh, indeed!

Buchloh: You're not constructing an imaginary relationship to Poussin as a moment of redemption of painting's crisis in the present—

Koether: No, no. It's not that. I've posed that question to myself, too: Why am I drawn to this? What is it that makes me want to look *there*, and how can I in a way reconcile it with living here right now? But I find that everything presented as a culture of memory—or "memory schemes," as I call them—is so

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

> dissatisfying. Dissatisfying in every way, not only intellectually but *visually.* The whole redoing, rehashing, reenacting, and retrospectivizing thing. . . . So every painting is an act to undo those schemes, reclaim one's own sketch of life, a mapping of emotions . . . to figure a sensibility that runs all five senses as if wired up first in drawing then in paint. The canvas, my *centre de recherche,* my *Champrovent,* my *Maquis,* my *Fortune,* is the residence of painting itself. . . . What I can offer is the time of my painting—making this time possible, making it felt, sharing it—so that other people can be drawn in, affected. I want to say, *Come on . . . don't you also want to be in this project somehow?*

Buchloh: The Harvard performance triggered exactly what you're describing.

Koether: And now I would love to visit the Gemäldegalerie to see Poussin's *Phaeton and Helios* and the Metropolitan Museum to visit Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion,* so there can be yet another "from this moment on"! After that, every day in the studio is a "Harvard performance."

Benjamin Buchloh
A Conversation with Jutta Koether
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.15-33.

OCTOBER

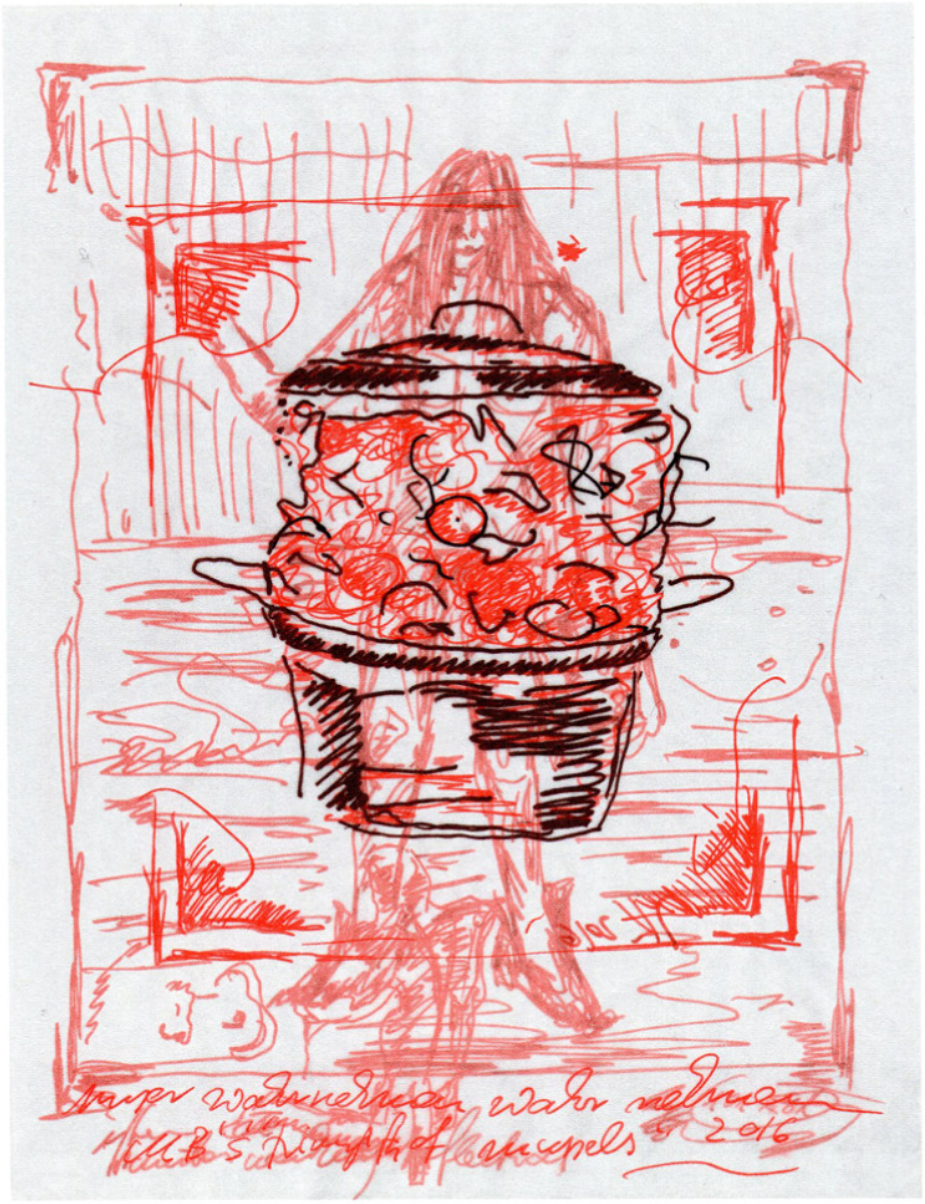
More Naked than Naked

JUTTA KOETHER

OCTOBER 157, Summer 2016, pp. 3–14.

Jutta Koether
More Naked Than Naked
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.3-14.

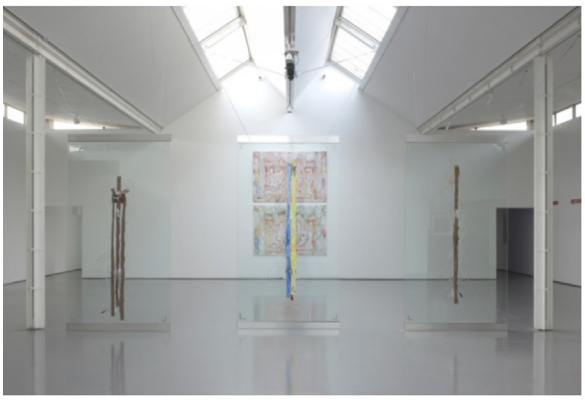
Jutta Koether
More Naked Than Naked
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.3-14.



Jutta Koether
More Naked Than Naked
October, N°157, Summer, 2016, p.3-14.

MOUSSE

Jutta Koether “Seasons and Sacraments” at DCA, Dundee

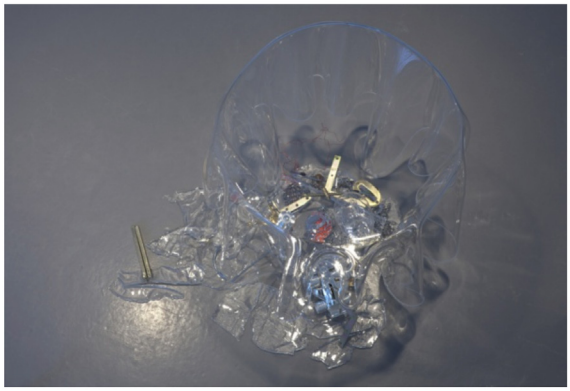


Featuring a selection of new and recent works, “Seasons and Sacraments” is Jutta Koether’s response to two important series of paintings by the French artist Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and is the largest exhibition of the artist’s work in the UK to date.

“Seasons and Sacraments” is an exhibition of contemporary paintings by an artist who is remembering, repeating and working within the tradition of historical painting, while at the same time deviating from and radicalising the conceivably conservative position of being a painter

The idea of “Network Painting” is central to Koether’s work. It is a term coined by the art historian David Joselit in his essay *Painting Beside Itself* from the journal *October, 2009*. It references a statement by Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997), a contemporary of Koether’s, in which he states that: “Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it’s art is dreadful. The whole network is important!”. Koether acknowledges and emphasises the act of reading and re-interpreting paintings within her own work. This process was expanded in a performative event by the artist which will took place in the galleries on Thu 7 March.

Jutta Koether, *Penance,* 2012-2013

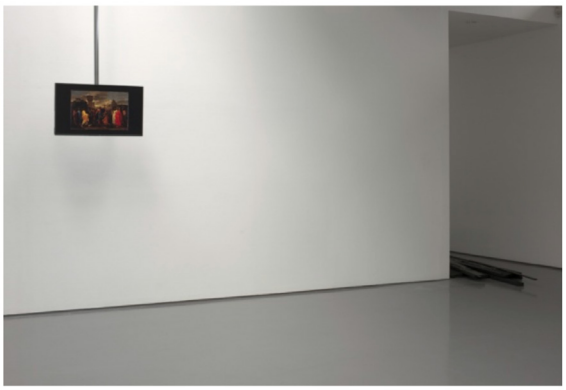


Jutta Koether, *Penance,* 2012-2013

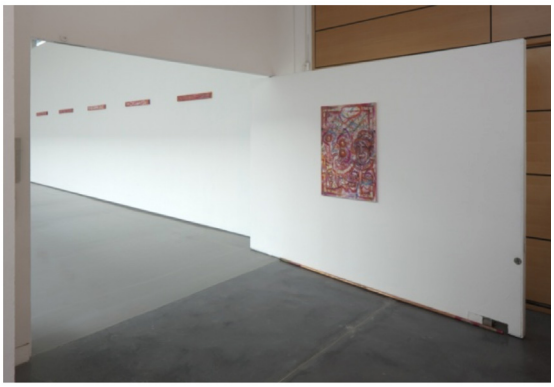
Jutta Koether “Seasons and Sacraments” at DCA, Dundee
Mousse Magazine, March 13, 2013.
https://urlr.me/cnGNKH

Jutta Koether, *Ordination*, 2012-2013 (detail)

Jutta Koether, *Extreme Unction*, 2012- 2013



Jutta Koether, *Eucharist*, 2012-2013



Jutta Koether, *Baptism*, 2012-2013

Jutta Koether "Seasons and Sacraments" at DCA, Dundee
Mousse Magazine, March 13, 2013.
https://urlr.me/cnGNKH

ARTFORUM

This page, from left: **Jutta Koether and Kim Gordon's performance as part of "The Thirst," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, March 4, 2011.** Photo: Albin Dahlström. **View of "The Thirst," 2011,** Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Photo: Albin Dahlström. **Jutta Koether and Kim Gordon during their performance as part of "The Thirst," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, March 4, 2011.** Photo: Albin Dahlström. Opposite page, from left: **Jutta Koether, *Souveraine Nr.5 (after Peaches)*, 2009,** acrylic on canvas, 88 x 65½". **Jutta Koether, *Rising (small version)*, 2006,** acrylic on canvas, 15 x 19⅞". **Jutta Koether and Tony Conrad during their performance as part of "The Thirst," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, April 8, 2011.** Photo: Åsa Lundén.

Jutta Koether

MODERNA MUSEET, STOCKHOLM

Ina Blom

AT THE ENTRANCE to Jutta Koether's exhibition at Moderna Museet, a sculptural arrangement greeted the visitor. Comprising a metallic red platform and a partially framed glass pane placed at an angle to a video projection, it suggested that one should pay special attention to the performance that took place during the opening, on that very spot, by the artist and Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon. The projected video was a documentation of this event, and judging from the size of the crowd and the scratching and beating of instruments onstage, it must have been intense. But in the brightly lit hallway, the projection looked muted and washed-out, and Koether and Gordon's vocal, keyboard, and guitar actions were at lowered volume. In fact, in the projected documentation, performative presence and avant-rock noise were both subsumed under fleeting electronic layers of a video remix of Koether's painterly images—as if the very tenets of such a performance were contingent on the atmospheric medium of paintings.

It was hard, then, not to see this video as an allegory of what came next. For the first section of the show presented you with something approaching an exposition on the relation between two paragons of performance: the painterly heroics of Abstract Expressionism and the slashes, rips, and lashings of countless rock events, with detours through Happenings and *Aktionen* along the way. Maybe I've spent too much time in clubs, but how else to respond to a painting exhibition that gave you a roomful of free-standing glass panels on the recto sides of which are suspended smeary blackish-gray paintings shimmering with mirrors, metal, and leather patches, the material accoutrements of metal, goth, and punk? And which, once you crossed the room and saw the verso sides, hit you with a series of paintings that glow with the intense pinkish reds and oranges of an infinite psychedelic dreamscape? Here was the color code of rock iconography, the recto and verso of rock culture itself: "outsider" blacks and "magic" reds, as articulated in the contrast between the biker imagery of Kenneth Anger's 1963 *Scorpio Rising* and the sun-drenched occult-hippie fantasy of his ca. 1970–81 *Lucifer Rising* (which Koether herself referenced in two *Rising* paintings from 2006 and 2008). Here also were the two colors of rock performance—the pitch-darkness of the club space and the sudden flashing red lights onstage—brought to life through a spatial design that was itself a clever form of spectator management.

With the recto/verso hanging, Koether seemed set on determining the specific way in which these paintings would perform *for* you and *with* you. As if to underscore the point, the pink-orange paintings mainly depicted such female star performers as Peaches, Maria Callas, and Kylie Minogue at the peak moment of onstage action and communion with their audiences. The radiant and transparent brushwork in these red paintings—so different from the lowly smears in the mostly abstract black paintings—seems to indicate that such personae are not so much bathing in the projector lights as emanating that light themselves, through the sheer power and virtuosity of their stage presence. In this sense, Koether's painterly technique itself sides wholeheartedly with the very force and mythos of popular performance.

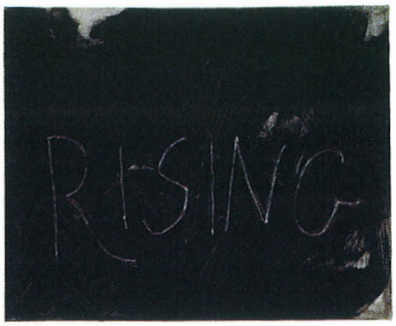
Still, this was not simply an exposition on the continuities between high and low or between the most ambitious bids for immanence in the realms of modern painting and popular music, respectively. Koether's association of painterly action and rock performance seems instead to highlight and to play off certain inescapable cultural and historical differences. These differences could be seen to revolve around a term—*vulgar*—that might on first impression seem to unite the two realms. In his beautifully perceptive 1994 essay "In Defense of Abstract Expressionism," T. J. Clark suggests that the strength of AbEx painting comes from a highly specific form of ambition: notably, the aspiration to the individuality of the aristocrat,

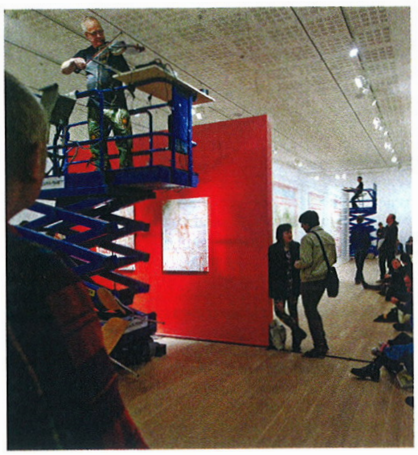
Koether seemed set on determining the specific way in which her paintings would perform for you and *with* you.

a will to greatness made all the more poignant by the essential emptiness of that desire, its pretension to a state of being that escapes bourgeois accountability and the related realist modes of representation. This painterly ambition could be named vulgarity but should not be confused with the merely popular, since *vulgarity* here signifies precisely the attempt to leap beyond signification and context—to go beyond, in fact, all systems of value.

As it happens, in *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (1987), Robert Pattison employed almost the same set of terms when attempting to make sense of the ideological and aesthetic underpinnings that unite the expanding catalogue of musical forms called "rock." Vulgarity, he argued, is their common denominator, and again the term does not simply refer to the popular or even to "bad taste." Instead, it points to a refusal to recognize or to be in any way identified with the

Ina Blom
Jutta Koether – Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Artforum, Summer, 2011, p.394-395.





hierarchies and values that anchor us in social space and that give meaning to terms such as *education*, *tradition*, and *history*. On the practical level of musical production and expression, such vulgarity is instantiated through rock's constant reinvention of the ephemeral, the fleeting and nonsubstantial, its celebration of grandiose pointlessness verging, at times, on transfixing dumbness. (Noise and sex are among the key resources here.) Rock is, in short, all about the ambition to attain the privileges of just *being*, without further qualification.

Yet simply to see a continuum of great, empty performative gestures would be to disregard the differences between the genres and cultural circuits that produce such ambitions in the first place. To struggle (in vain) for radical individuality in the already rarefied realm of modern painting, and to be heroically misrecognized by all but an elite group of cognoscenti, is obviously very different from placing your bid for radical individualism on the basis of rock's collective processes of identification. In other words, you are not just a star subject adored by an audience, but more accurately an "audience subject," a projection of audience desires. For the rock performer is not just a key figure in what has been called a new "mass individualism" but, even more pertinently, the driving force behind an ascendant singularization of social collectives, the emergence of social forms born not out of necessity but out of an unruly spirit of invention and creativity. As an audience subject, she or he is above all a nodal point in the media machineries that run on *collective* desires to escape hierarchichal value systems—as expressed in the constant proliferation of musical subgenres and microcultures. Again, Koether's painterly technique takes us there: In painting after painting, the radiant red brushstrokes that perform, so to speak, the power of the musical stars also bring out the figure of the audience as an effect of that same radiance, as if their coming into being were part of a single painterly and performative force.

If traces of the dream of aristocratic freedom still live on in such collective desires, they persist in a mode so shadowy, so transformed, that it has lost nearly all of its original raison d'être: The aristocrat cannot, by definition, be multiple. Yet Koether's paintings—hovering between the greatest modern ambitions of painting qua painting and the atmospheric, quasi-magic embrace of audiences that makes painting align itself with ephemeral video projections, noise, and club experiences—seem to trace precisely this process of transformation as it affects painting itself. Her works do not just point melancholically to a social world forever left behind; they also, more enthusiastically, gesture toward a reality in which painting's peculiar means and ends will not necessarily be lost or made irrelevant but will be strategically aligned with other social forces. Koether's intensive colors are, for instance, performatives in their own right. While wholly dependent on the material base of paint (neither the depth of the black paintings nor the radiance of the red ones reproduces well), the effect of her colors cannot ultimately be limited to this medium and its set of references. Rather, the hues seem to work alongside technologies, media, and situations—projector lights, club spaces, Anger movies—that may deliver analogous intensities and so both reinforce and expand those of painting itself.

In this unresolved situation, an expanded concept of spectator management is the order of the day. Against the great empty freedoms of Abstract Expressionist painting, with its allover expanses and open gestures—recalled most poignantly in Koether's black paintings—the second half of the exhibition highlighted how the forces of painting also act as situational constraints. Named "*Berliner Schlüssel*," 2010, after a key that quite literally forces you into locking your door from the inside once you have used the key to enter your apartment, the series of works shown here presents painting as an independent agent or performer that shapes actions and produces specific social situations. Once more we were led through a precisely designed environment—narrow, corridor-like spaces where the paintings seemed to double as wall partitions. But in this section, the architectural partitioning, or the precise parceling-out of visual-performative space, was also pursued within the frame of painting itself. Painted partitions and frames of all kinds, sketchily rendered decorative wall elements and construction details such as metal corners normally used to reinforce the backside of picture frames, invade the image space, imposing themselves on a flow of imagery where rock-related performance themes mingle freely with motifs ranging from Baroque genre scenes to the expressionist bodies of Francis Bacon.

It is of course telling that painting's performative constraints—its historical ability to form specific audiences, to command specific modes of behavior—are foregrounded precisely at that moment when their register and scope would seem to have expanded: i.e., when the wannabe-elite individualism of modern abstraction segues into the wider realm of collective desires. For such a transition necessarily comes with the loss of a certain, much celebrated, indefinite mode of openness, initiated through the performative gestures of Abstract Expressionist painting. If there is any veracity to Koether's association of paintings and audience subjects, if painting can actually be imagined to perform alongside other forces in the creation of new social surfaces, one has to recognize the limits of such openness. One cannot ignore the specificity of such processes and the different aesthetic, economic, architectural, and media-driven elements that they inevitably involve. It is at this level of generative specifics that Koether makes painting perform both through and beyond abstraction's greatest ambitions—as if by recalling some of the collective things that painting once was, one could imagine the collective things it might become. □

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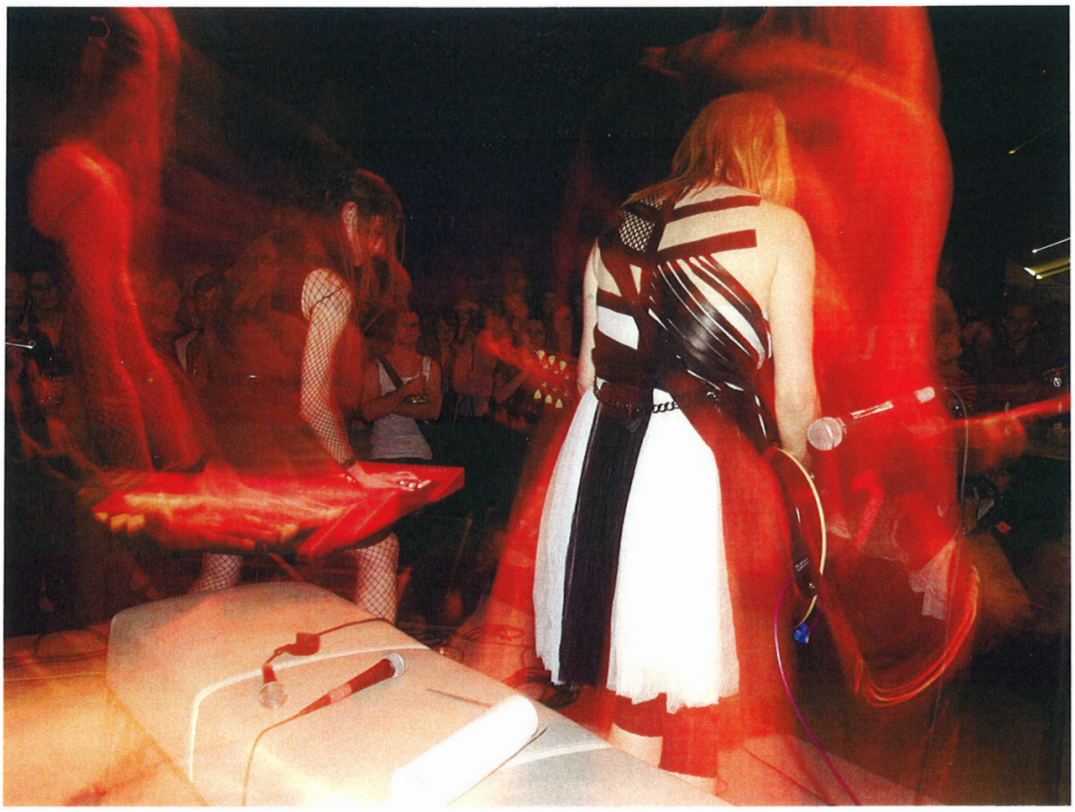
Ina Blom
Jutta Koether – Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Artforum, Summer, 2011, p.394-395.

Flash Art

INTERVIEW



Jutta Koether

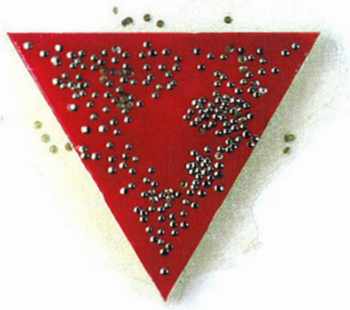
THE INSIDE JOB

Kim Gordon

KIM GORDON: *Let's talk about* Inside Job. *Maybe we should explain what it is.*
Jutta Koether: I wanted to come to New York to introduce what I was doing, which was painting, or rather conceptual art based and founded on painting, and all the baggage of what painting meant, particularly in Germany because that was where I came from.

KG: *Like Jörg Immendorf…*
JK: Perhaps, but also coming out of a yet-one-younger generation, and coming into this as a female artist. The early '90s posed a new challenge to painting altogether. It was the arrival of a new conceptual art that I was interested in. I decided to work from within, to use the conventions, and the newly forming conventions, of what New York was producing in terms of being a young artist willing to "work the floor," to operate site-specific. Performative. This meant meeting a lot of people and doing studio visits, something I was not used to. In Germany very few people had that kind of social behavior; we meet at the bar and that's where one talked about art, took a position! In New York I adapted to conventions but altered the rules toward my needs and abilities. I was inter-

Kim Gordon
Jutta Koether/The Inside Job
Flash Art, January—February, 2011, p.84-87.



ested in interviews and conversations. I made paintings and let people participate in various ways; you could walk on my paintings but you could also have a sit with me, talk either about the painting or painting in general or Germany… They were all one-to-one encounters. It was through that that I learned about certain legacies and practices, such as Lee Lozano for example.

KG: *I think I remember coming there.*
JK: I think you were there. Every day then I would write a report of what had happened. I wouldn't type it but write notes and make notebooks, and the next day all the visitors could see what I had written… My commentary on these people and the experience itself. People who came after two weeks read all the commentaries that I had done on the other people as well as the progress on my paintings, my feelings about the whole thing — a kind of emotional rollercoaster. *Inside Job* was, among other things, about getting access to people in the art world; I like this word play.

KG: *Did you show that painting?*
JK: It was shown at Friedrich Petzel's and Nina Borgmann's loft; she was his partner in his first gallery and at the time they were interested in possibly showing my work. They showed it there, but then it was rolled up until it was shown again in 2006 for "Fantasia Colonia," at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne.

KG: *And when they showed it, did they display it differently? Did you have some explanations?*
JK: They showed it bare. Just off the boat, or the studio, so to speak. Formally it resembled an Antonius Höckelmann painting. Very layered, too colorful, kind of raw. But then there were the drawing books and the commentary book with the reports about the visitors too. They functioned as evidence of the experience, as a diary, but also as a kind of manual to understand figures, motives, composition in the painting. A kind of manual to "read" the painting. The painting was kind of chaotic. The composition had these weird sexualized body parts, the figures were trying to communicate but they couldn't. It was very dense and diaristic, and it was almost impossible to like it. So the actual manual books as well as the catalogue called *The Inside Job* containing all the writings and some documents need to be considered external elements of the painting itself. Altogether *The Inside Job* was a way of penetrating a social fabric (the Downtown New York art world around 1991) while suggesting and starting my own brand of weaving at the same time. The literal platform for this was the semi-public making of a painting in the studio accompanied by suggestions, desires and pro-

From top left clockwise: JUTTA KOETHER, JXXXA-PPR01 2, 2008 acrylic on canvas, 40 x 50 cm. Courtesy Francesca Pia, Zurich. Photo: Dominique Uldry. JUTTA KOETHER, Bitches Brew, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, mixed applied materials and accessories, liquid glass, 91 x 112 cm. Courtesy Sutton Lane, London / Paris / Brussels. JUTTA KOETHER, Dämonen für Damen, Horror und Kinder, 2010. Mixed media, liquid glass on canvas, installation view Utopie und Monument II, Graz, 2010. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin. JUTTA KOETHER, Palindrom, 2009. Acrylic, liquid glass and rivets on wooden triangle, 44 x 43 cm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin. JUTTA KOETHER, Ganz (100% Meiere! – Niemand ist ohne Frau), 1991. Oil on canvas, 250 x 200 cm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin. Opposite: KIM GORDON & JUTTA KOETHER, view of the performance at the Kunsthaus Graz, 2009. Photo: Universalmuseum Joanneum / Matthias Winkler.

Kim Gordon
Jutta Koether/The Inside Job
Flash Art, January—February, 2011, p.84-87.

jections by others through the conversations that took place with it, on it, near it.

KG: *You didn't go to art school. How did you meet Martin Kippenberger and Michael Krebber? Did you meet them in a bar?!*
JK: I met Kippenberger through other artists and through work. His visit to Cologne was a big event and I interviewed him because I was interested in his way to be an artist. I happened to be in Cologne — Krebber is from Cologne too — and when Kippenberger moved in 1980 or '81, I started meeting him, although I had briefly met him when he was still in Berlin, again through other artists. Cologne was this sort of place where people met; I also met a lot of Americans, way before I met them here.

KG: *What was your relationship to these people?*
JK: I was around and part of a certain development. I wrote about people — that could be a measurement perhaps. I was part of a culturally active environment. My home base though was not a gallery or the bar but *Spex* magazine.

KG: *What about feminism? There's this great picture of you and Cosima von Bonin with the machine guns… I know it's a cliché but still it comes off in an intriguing way.*
JK: That "infamous" picture of a sort of guerrilla troupe was almost like a mock of a feminist take, especially because it was initiated by a guy, Hans Jörg Mayer. We played along and I think each of the participants took it in that way. For me it was almost like a goodbye picture because I was leaving. It was hard to figure out any kind of role for me in Germany in performance art. It is funny that it still circulates here and there. It resurfaced truly in the show "Make Your Own Life" curated by Bennett Simpson at the Philadelphia ICA in 2006.

KG: *You told me once that Yoko Ono was important.*
JK: Yes, but that was when I was really young. As student I got interested in the trajectory of "women's art, feminist art" and the renegade even within that… I looked at Ulrike Rosenbach, Rosemarie Trockel. Those were the accessible ones. I read a lot. The problem zone I liked to dig into though was painting. There were not that many models rethinking painting by women around. But at some point I did discover Maria Lassnig.

KG: *But then there was Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen or later Merlin Carpenter…*
JK: Sure, and truly challenging practices with painting. One of my first projects was titled "Smell of Female" after the record and song by The Cramps. I also like to incorporate living social facts from a point of view that is shaped by the female experience. I like to do things with painting that men cannot do. And yet finding the knowledge of the other doesn't mean to limit yourself, or self-marginalization. I like tactics. Not to stabilize expectations but to confound them. Even those of your friends. Even your own.

KG: *This is probably why I'm drawn to the scene of Simone Forti, Joan Jonas and Yvonne Rainer — people whose works are not object-directed. It's a little more elusive in that sense.*
JK: Yeah, but if you address in an analytical way the mechanism of how things are established, Forti, Jonas and Rainer really question those mechanisms; it's not about fulfilling the anti-role. To me that was really like another proposition, and a huge achievement. Now for me there is always that other site: painting. How to construct propositions like the ones above through painting.

KG: *It's funny. When we do music performances I always found it so great to perform in this art context. It's not that I'm not nervous but I just find it incredibly enjoyable cause it seems people are looking in another way. In the art context it doesn't matter if people don't think this is great — it's a moment where the judgment is suspended.*
JK: You just create a moment, what I call "invisible brushstroke," and that's why I like performing, beside the fact that it's not an object after all. It's a very intense moment, for me similar to when I look at an artwork that is really fascinating.

KG: *Do you see it as an expanded form of painting?*
JK: Sort of. It is expanded, but it is the perception that is getting expanded, not an object, not a thing. Performance is an act to establish possible afterimages that then will reflect back on the paintings. And sometimes I rather set it up like a zone, where you can have other experiences. It's like *The Dream House* by La Monte Young, but only for a moment.

KG: *I really felt that when we played in Paris at Sutton Lane in 2008. That* über *small space that was so pure with no desk or furniture…*

Kim Gordon
Jutta Koether/The Inside Job
Flash Art, January—February, 2011, p.84-87.

JK: Not to forget that the painting we played in front of was that stark remake of Cezanne's *Bathers* that is in Philadelphia, where there are these women who are wandering around without knowing what they are really doing and yet they form this perfect composition. I thought that was a really great interaction, working as painting as well as a backdrop.

KG: *And we didn't know what we were really doing!! I really liked the "Dead Already" show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art in 2007. I could write pages. We should because it was not really documented and it would be great to try to reconstruct it. And I loved the crown, the carpet, that blush nude body carpet to re-envision feminism, having Isadora Duncan's teacher coming down and teaching a class and these art crowds; there was a lot of energy put into it. That happened in a gallery situation and that's why it was so successful.*
JK: It was very much related to the downtown New York community, a small noise music scene, young artists, current and former students. I'm interested in investigating the various roles and functions the artist has these days in a very particular environment. To keep questioning this as well as questioning the objects in these settings. Collaborations, collective practices and performances are all part of an ongoing investigation that uses painting as core, enigma, trigger, trash pile. I put them in situations that are questioning their existence, their tasks, functions, history. And in the long run those kind of exchanges really are the foundations for new form and thinking onwards.

KG: *Besides me you have collaborated with John Miller, Steven Parrino and others.*
JK: Yes, and this makes me think I should take care of that. My interest in the future is to try a different set of rules of engagement. So instead of having an idea about three or four paintings, I'm trying to establish concrete ideas that can be embodied in a person but like a commission, an imagined commission; making a painting from that relation, and with every work a text would come, so that it would work like a classical painting with a lot of preparation. I'm trying to figure out a different way of speaking to somebody.

KG: *It seems the opposite of what interior decoration does, which is what art is doing pretty often. You said that you did the painting that was last year in the Independent specifically for Sutton Lane. What was about that painting?*
JK: First of all the format was the art fair and there was a demand to make a new work that had to fit into a specific place and space. But the core, what is actually on the painting, was deeply connected to Gil Presti and Manuela Campoli, who run the gallery. I wanted to have a motif related to them, based on a real experience. Reena Spaulings had done a show with Sutton Lane in Brussels titled "The Belgian Marbles," strongly referencing Marcel Broodthaers and his connoisseurs like Krebber. Broodthaers is a focal point also for an earlier show that Gil curated at his gallery in Paris called "Signatures." To share the enthusiasm and thoughts surrounding those events, we all took this trip together to the Brussels' Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts and looked at the Broodthaers collection. There was this piece with the red pot and the mussels and I decided this is the iconic link between all of us (me being so invested in red painting.) At the same time, when we were discussing the possible work to bring to the Independent, there was this question around "what people want." I decided to insert things also using the essence of that desire, of what they wanted, or perhaps to make a painting that articulated this thought; not to fulfill desire but to make a piece that asks the question: "What is it that you call desire?" So there's the pot, the collage, the liquid glass and these brackets, which are moving themselves. The whole piece came from these premises, and the whole thing is not "complete" in that sense. It is an open landscape with a lighting rod going through a pot, and things spilling out of the pot that become too real, too literal. I titled it *Bitches Brew* (which is of course the title of the classic Miles Davis album, basically establishing a new genre of jazz). But it's not that we need all these things to understand the painting. ■

Kim Gordon is a musician, artist, vocalist, performer and a member of the band Sonic Youth.

Jutta Koether was born in 1958 in Cologne. She lives and works in New York, Berlin and Hamburg, where she is Professor of Painting at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK). In February 2011 she will have a solo show at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

Above from left: JUTTA KOETHER, Mède, 1992. Oil on canvas, 200 x 250 cm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin. JUTTA KOETHER, Hysterics Men, 2001. Acrylic on canvas, 41 x 51 cm. Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. JUTTA KOETHER, installation view at the Whitney Biennial, New York, 2006. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin. JUTTA KOETHER, Volume 13, 2005. Mixed media, 50 x 50 cm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin.

Kim Gordon
Jutta Koether/The Inside Job
Flash Art, January—February, 2011, p.84-87.

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

REVIEWS

PYRRHIC VICTORIES
Sam Lewitt on Jutta Koether at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

"Lux Interior", Jutta Koether's most recent exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, confronted viewers with a spare, awkwardly arranged display. As its sole element one encountered a single painting, hung on an independent, slightly off-center wall. The wall, swiveled at an oblique angle, extends off from the edge of the gallery's stage-like viewing space: anthropomorphically caught between entering and exiting. The wall and canvas' spatial arrangement are at once unceremonious—the canvas is too large for its supporting wall, haphazardly jutting above it—and self-consciously sparse—one cannot see the canvas from the gallery's entryway, but rather must walk around it to get a view, creating the immediate impression upon entry of an architectural irregularity framed by an empty gallery. The painting itself, titled "Hot Rod (After Poussin)", presents an anemic to-scale remake of Nicolas Poussin's "Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe" (1651).

Koether's painting extends her endeavor to displace the disreputable history of neo-expressionism. She directs the gestural/figurative tropes of neo-expressionism's retrograde semblance of interiority toward the status of an overripe surface. Poussin's mythological subject is thinned and dehydrated here, his academicism submitted to an incongruous gesturality that falls short of the assumptions of painterly authority or pathos that a reactionary expressionism would want to keep intact. Koether's marshaling of Poussin is imbued with both identification and aggression toward an extended history of painterly mastery. The academic subject of the painting is vitiated rather than vivified by Koether's brusque marks, which delineate neither the dubious unified subject of expressionism, nor the compositional unity of classicism. The historical figures of painterly authority that appear in "Lux Interior" are summoned with extreme ambivalence.[1] Their labors are recoded by marks of an agitated paintbrush, at once trepidatious and overly grandiose. If we dismiss this as the facile irony of parodic citation on the one hand, or as the all too earnest work of an adoring supplicant—merely courting the perversion which lands squarely on the desire for *père-version*—then we would miss the intensified form of ambiguity which Koether holds on to as the work's most complex stake: What sort of subject position can this work possibly be rehearsing?

What drives Koether's exhibition is neither its central painting, nor its mode of display per se, but both of these elements' participation in a series of three "acts", executed as performance-lectures and staged in front of and around "Hot Rod (after Poussin)" throughout the show's duration. The confrontation between painting and performer adds another layer of reference to Koether's exhibition. T. J. Clark's 2006 book "The Sight of Death" is submitted to a re-staging in "Lux Interior". Clark's book, subtitled "An Experiment in Art Writing", consists of a series of diary entries, written during a research stint at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. The book focuses his considerable energies on two paintings by Poussin in the museum's collection, which happened to be hanging in the same gallery at the time of his tenure.

Koether plunders this brooding textual scene, re-constructing an impoverished version of Clark's contemplative museum interior: installing a harsh spotlight glaring at her "Poussin", in reference to Clark's repeated observations on the delicacies of interplay between tungsten light-

Sam Lewitt
Pyrrhussiege/Pyrrhic Victories
Texte zur Kunst, N°76, September, 2009, p.145-147.

ing and the California morning sun. Clark seeks to claim a position of autonomy for a prolonged visual engagement in the service of art historical cogitation, his daily jottings serving as an embodied argument for a disappearing form of optical experience. In her "acts" Koether re-stages this scene, yet supplants its documentation of optical competence with an unmoored constitution in language; one which is pocked with moments of blind, uncontrolled vituperation in her recitation of a prepared script. The art historian's careful discussion of what he *sees* is transferred to the artist's at times acquiescent, at times belligerent protest in producing herself to a viewing audience.

Koether's acts operate between stage-directed theater and spontaneous bodily disorder. Her uncomfortable manner of reading the prepared text of these monologues, scrawled in red marker across translucent pieces of paper and punctuated with sudden unruliness – stomping, shaking, pacing – in turn lash-out and entreat recognition from viewers. An unstable delivery of inconsistent modes of address reigns here, oscillating between rage-filled regurgitation of lyrics from songs by The Cramps[2] and the mandarin authority of academic pictorial analyses. If this performance strategy smacks of the antagonizing *Selbstdarsteller*, it would seem historically apt in light of Koether's formation within the milieu revolving around the canonical nihilism of certain masculinist painters in 1980s–90s Cologne. However, the self-asserting domination of audiences witness to the endless Kippenberger joke only bears upon Koether's performances insofar as the former's hyperbolic, publicly aggrandizing posture is inverted by the latter into a thematic fixation on self-immolation.

During Koether's acts it became apparent to spectators unfamiliar with her work that these outbursts would not result in delineating an identifiable contradiction between cultural forms of linguistic representation that could compete for cultural authority, let alone an analytically derived judgment about those forms. The comportment of official forms of speech and the compulsive, rhythmical recitations of punk rock strategies of cultural debasement and annihilation are collapsed here: both are subsumed as the chatter of an artistic subjectivity at once evacuated and energized by a performed anxiety regarding the artist's capacity to publicly position herself. Koether undermines conventional sites of discursive value production, such as the artist's statement, press release[3] and gallery talk by deploying a language that constantly loses its thread of self-reflection. She instead attempts to locate the dimension of (an at times self-destructive) force in language that operates regardless of the consensual conditions of communicative action. The tenor of her acts fluctuate between the ingratiation of audience consideration – "This is my new painting" – to self-laceration – as in her recurrent enunciation "blow up my mind. Lightning bolt my brain"[4]; a transfer that is distanced from an ironic cue to audience complicity by Koether's awkward delivery.

Yet something contrived undoubtedly subsists in this characterization of language of which Koether seems aware. Koether's rants find themselves directed toward the presentation of an artist reduced to a sequence of postures imbued with the force of a singularly perturbed soma; one that seems to find recourse to articulated intent only by culminating in iterable, readymade utterances. She stages the fall from a self-definitional language of description by placing herself in the chasm between her optically *ersatz* rendition of a subject of classicist order and a targeted explosion of that subject in a chaotic, regurgitated script.

A grave consequence of all this might be that Koether's authoritative speech and energetic prattle results in a definitively negative evaluation of the linguistic resources available for an attempt at self-constitution. Yet the coherence of this negative judgment itself seems to be doubted by Koether's uncomfortable acts. It appears as if Koether would like nothing more than to pull the rug out from under the audience's firm footing in the work, whether optical or linguistic, at the very same time that she finds her own sure ground withdrawn. Whatever remains after

Sam Lewitt
Pyrrhussiege/Pyrrhic Victories
Texte zur Kunst, N°76, September, 2009, p.145-147.

this assault on an assumed access to subjectivity inscribed into works of art, it allows for the perception that Koether's destruction of a descriptive access to self-experience is no less unsavory than a discourse – such as this review – which by its very form would seek to occupy a transcendent position over an at times crippled, at times demonic force of unhinged language.

Jutta Koether, "Lux Interior", Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, April 26 – May 24, 2009.

Notes

1 In addition to "Hot Rod (after Poussin)", the only other work of Koether's hanging in the gallery was a paint-by-numbers Cezanne, derived from an amateur painting kit and colored in by Koether, which sat in the gallery's open office throughout the exhibition.
2 The exhibition title derives from the name of that band's now deceased lead singer.
3 Next to the gallery issued statement, Koether had on view a dossier of "research materials", which included portions of the writing that went into her acts.
4 A citation from The Cramps' song "Blow Up Your Mind".

Sam Lewitt
Pyrrhussiege/Pyrrhic Victories
Texte zur Kunst, N°76, September, 2009, p.145-147.

spex

Max Dax and Martin Hossbach
Entspannt in den Konjunkturen der Sympathie
Spex, N°318, January—February, 2009, p.106-109.

ENTSPANNT IN DEN KONJUNKTUREN DER SYMPATHIE

Jutta Koether

Als Teil der Spex-Redaktion prägte Jutta Koether in den Achtzigern den Tonfall, in welchem seitdem in deutscher Sprache über Musik und Popkultur verhandelt wird – besondere Bekanntheit erlangte ihre Kolumne ›Mrs. Benway‹ über moderne Kunst. Sie begann die Lager zu wechseln, wagte etliche Seiteneinstiege, wurde Performancekünstlerin, Malerin, Musikerin, Theoretikerin und Buchautorin. Anlässlich ihrer großen Ausstellung in der Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Köln spricht die 1958 geborene Wahl-New-Yorkerin über Fluch und Segen multipler Karriereoptionen.

INTERVIEW: MAX DAX UND MARTIN HOSSBACH **FOTO JUTTA KOETHER:** NATALIE BOTHUR **ALLE BILDER:** JUTTA KOETHER / GALERIE DANIEL BUCHHOLZ

Jutta, du hast deine Künstlerkarriere als Quereinsteigerin begonnen. Du warst Herausgeberin und Autorin der Spex, dann begannst du, selbst als Malerin zu wirken.

Quereinstieg in Bezug auf was? Da hilft nur unbeirrte Analyse! In New York habe ich die Konjunkturen der Sympathie, des Zuspruchs und des Erfolgs wie eine Sinuskurve wahrgenommen: die Gunst kommt, die Gunst geht, der Künstler darf sich nicht beirren lassen. Das galt letztlich auch für mich, als ›Quereinsteigerin‹. Ich kann beobachten und die Values herausfiltern, die Komponenten. Und trotzdem erlebt man in diesem System eine Vielzahl von Widersprüchlichkeiten.

Du sagst: Man darf sich nicht beirren lassen.

Es geht darum, eine Methode zu entwickeln, wie man die Bedingungen, unter denen man agiert und arbeitet und sich sozial bewegt, aktiv selbst gestaltet – statt sich die Bedingungen diktieren zu lassen. Schließlich verteilt sich, misst sich auch der Raum, in dem man sich bewegt, ständig neu. In diesem Sinne war ich auch eine sehr interessierte Leserin von Rainald Goetz' Blog »Klage«. Anders gesprochen: Our best efforts are temporary!

So, wie du deine Autorenposition immer neu hinterfragst?

Ich glaubte nicht an eine Künstlerkarriere im bürgerlichen Sinne. Zumindest kam das für mich nicht in Frage. Ich bin ganz klar geprägt von meinem eigenen Werdegang als Seiteneinsteigerin, gepaart mit einem Interesse an Popkultur. Mein Werdegang ist mittlerweile nichts Besonderes mehr, eher beispielhaft für eine längst gängige kulturelle Praxis, die multiple Autorenpositionen ermöglicht. Man geht diesen Weg, weil man ein Interesse an Kultur, an Kunst, an Geschichte, an Musik hat. Ich auf alle Fälle habe mich immer als Teil einer aktiven Kultur, vielleicht auch einer Subkultur begriffen, die es mir gestattete, heute das eine und morgen das andere zu tun. Ein ›großer Künstler‹ im Sinne der Künstlerfürsten-Tradition zu werden, darum ging es mir nie.

War das schon immer so?

Schon 1972, da war ich 14 Jahre alt, interessierte ich mich für Zusammenhänge. Wenn ich Musik hörte, wollte ich wissen, auf welche andere Musik die sich wohl bezieht. Und nicht nur Musik: Alle Mädchen in meiner Schule trugen teure Lodenmäntel – ich trug einen Bundeswehr-Parka für 20 Mark. Ich fühlte mich nicht minderwertig, im Gegenteil, ich war imstande, den Parka als Zeichen der Popkultur zu begreifen, das für mehr als seinen Kaufpreis steht, und konnte darüber hinaus im Religionsunterricht und in Geschichte Marxismus diskutieren – also lernen, die Dinge zu besprechen. Klassenunterschiede waren nicht nur theoretisch. Ich erlebte die Reibung mit den existierenden, vorgegebenen Wegen hautnah und in frühen Jahren, ich war damals schon gezwungen, eigene Regeln aufzustellen. Und fand dafür in der Kultur verschiedenste Ansätze.

Wie hast du Subkultur damals erlebt?

Ich bewegte mich Mitte der Siebziger in Subkulturen, die einfach da waren: ein bisschen Hippie, ein bisschen Politik. Punk änderte alles: Schlagartig war alles klar! Im Sommer '76 trampte ich durch England. Die Sex Pistols passierten. Ich wurde, vier Jahre vor Spex, Zeugin eines Urknalls.

1980 kam Spex. Ihr habt die Sprache erfunden, in der man seitdem auf Deutsch über Popkultur schreiben kann.

Wie die Dinge halt so passieren. Wir haben uns ja nicht hingesetzt und eine Sprache ›erfunden‹. Wir waren einfach zum richtigen Zeitpunkt am richtigen Ort. Ich habe seither immer gesagt: Diese Redaktion, die Spex, war meine Hochschule, meine Matrix für die Welt. Der redaktionelle Austausch war das einzig relevante Übungsfeld für alles. Diese Auseinandersetzung war für alle Beteiligten existenziell wichtig und auch sicherlich für ihre je-

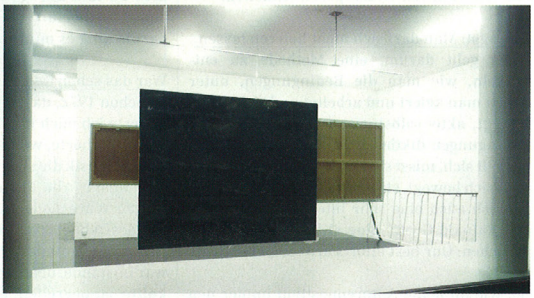
Max Dax and Martin Hossbach
Entspannt in den Konjunkturen der Sympathie
Spex, N°318, January—February, 2009, p.106-109.

Jutta Koether

»NEW YORKER FENSTER« *Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2008*

»NEW YORKER FENSTER" *Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2008*
Installationsansicht, »THE NECESSITY OF MULTIPLE INCONSISTENT FANTASIES #16, #13, #17, #19«, 2008 (links), »INKARNAT GEWAND«, 2008 (rechts)

BILD 3: »NEW YORKER FENSTER« *Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2008*
Installationsansicht, »CINÉTRACT: NEW YORKER FENSTER oder auch DIE SEELE ZWISCHEN HIMMEL UND HÖLLE 3«, 2008



»NEW YORKER FENSTER« *Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2008*
Installationsansicht, »DIE SEELE ZWISCHEN HIMMEL UND HÖLLE 2«, 2008

Max Dax and Martin Hossbach
Entspannt in den Konjunkturen der Sympathie
Spex, N°318, January—February, 2009, p.106-109.

weilige Zukunft sehr prägend. Wir haben Freiheit erlebt. Und übertragen auf mich bedeutete es, dass ich seitdem das Mandat hatte, verschiedene Karrieren parallel zu verfolgen.

Folgst du ein und derselben Idee, wenn du dich in verschiedenen Disziplinen bewegst?

Muss man das?

Wir fragen.

Ich weigere mich, so über diese Frage nachzudenken. Für mich gibt es immer mehrere Programmfenster, die in keinem Wettstreit miteinander stehen, die offen sind. Ich entscheide mich dann für das passende Terrain, auf dem ich mich ausdrücken will. Wir reden von Verschiebungen und Übergängen. Diese Praxis erschwert das einfache Machen und Konsumieren von Aussagen, sie macht sie obskurer, und sie schützt mich auch vor falschen Kategorisierungen. Wenn alle Stricke reißen, dann behaupte ich, ich sei Dichterin. Dann trage ich für einen Moment die Narrenkappe. You'll be a hero for a day! Aber ob ich das dann auch ›wirklich‹ bin, ist eine ganz andere Frage.

Du hast Gebrauch von den Vorzügen des Pseudonyms gemacht – als Mrs. Benway warst du Spex-Kolumnistin in Sachen Kunst.

Es ist hilfreich, eine Kunstfigur sein zu können. Es fällt leichter, Templates zu bedienen, wenn man die Identitäten wechseln kann. Aus der Rolle der Künstlerin gesprochen, möchte ich natürlich in der Lage sein, an Traditionen anzudocken. Ich entwickelte über die Jahre Methodiken und Systeme, um sowohl auf Traditionen zurückgreifen als auch die Mittel nutzen zu können, die sich mir aktuell, im Jetzt, im Moment anbieten. Daher auch der Titel meines Buchs mit diversen Schriften zur Popkultur, »Kairos«, der nicht ›Hipness‹ meint, sondern den richtigen Moment des Handelns beschreibt, der einen befähigt einzugreifen – einzugreifen in die Zeit, in der man lebt.

Greifst du mit deiner Malerei in die Zeit ein, wenn du etwa in deiner aktuellen Ausstellung »New Yorker Fenster« andere Maler zitierst, Traditionslinien herstellst, einfach einen Chagall oder Van Gogh im Stile des ›Bad Painting‹ nachmalst?

Die Bilder sind lesbar, da ich in ihnen immer wieder ganz konkrete Bezüge aufzeige. Ich will als Künstlerin ein Deutungsinteresse an der Malerei entfachen – bei mir und bei anderen. Denn: Malerei wird heute konsumiert, aber nicht gedeutet. Dabei liegen die Möglichkeiten von Malerei seit jeher in der Verschlüsselung – mir auf alle Fälle reicht es nicht, mir für die nächste Show einen neuen Stil anzueignen und diesen dann auszustellen. Ich weiß, ich kann es nicht erzwingen, aber ich möchte eine Art tieferen Lesens anregen.

Was bekommt der Betrachter denn zu lesen, wenn er sich auf deine Bilder einlässt?

Ich bemühe mich, viele meiner Bezüge und Querverweise für den Betrachter offenzulegen – aber nicht notwendigerweise zu erklären. Schließlich gibt es Kriterien, die ich mir setze, und die ich gerne mit meinem Publikum teile. Meine durchgearbeiteten Bilder können ihr kritisches Potenzial erst dann richtig ausspielen, wenn ich dem Betrachter ein paar Deutungsschlüssel mit auf den Weg gebe. Die Bilder sollen auf diese Weise erklären, warum sie auf der Welt und zu was sie fähig sind.

Nehmen wir dein Bild von Kylie Minogue, das neben deiner Maria Callas hängt.

Beide Vorlagen stammen aus dem Kölner Stadtanzeiger. Ich habe die Bilder übersetzt in die Bildsprache der quasimythologischen Figur der Scarlet Woman, die auch bei Aleister Crowley und Kenneth Anger auftaucht. Sie ist eine ähnliche Figurenappropriation wie Mrs. Benway, die sich auf William S. Burroughs' Dr. Benway in »Naked Lunch« bezog. Ich habe versucht, Kylie in meinem Bild zu ›optimieren‹, ihr Potenzial zu manifestieren. Darum geht es. Ich fühle mich dann immer wie ein Dichter. Dichter schreiben auch nicht in dem Bewusstsein, dass sie mit ihren Gedichten berühmt oder reich werden. Sie tun, was getan werden muss, und sie tun es in der nötigen Komplexität, und möglicherweise gibt es Briefwechsel, die für die Nachwelt erklären, worum es konkret in ihrer Poesie gegangen ist. Es ist der Versuch, eine Art Bezugssystem zu schaffen, das nicht ausschließlich mediale Massenbeglückung durch Kunst sucht. Die Sechziger sind vorbei. Warhol ist vorbei. Massenproduktion ist vorbei.

Und was ist heute?

Mich interessieren konzeptuelle Künstler wie Nic Guagnini, Merlin Carpenter, John Miller, Cameron Jamie, Cheyney Thompson oder Ei Arakawa – so unterschiedlich ihre Ansätze auch sind. Wir alle arbeiten innerhalb eines überschaubaren Wirkungskreises und sind uns dessen auch bewusst. Wir wissen um die inhaltlichen Möglichkeiten, die uns diese Arbeitsweise bietet – auch im Sinne der multiplen Künstlerpersönlichkeit. Ich kann als Musikerin auftreten, ich kann zwischendurch Schriften veröffentlichen. In diesem Zusammenhang wird aber auch das gemalte Bild und Malerei immer wieder neu verhandelt. In New York war in den letzten Jahren Reena Spaulings meine Plattform – man könnte auch sagen: meine Spex heute, mit ihrer Galerie und der Arbeit im Künstlerkollektiv. Bei ihr haben Kim Gordon und ich in einer gemeinschaftlich kuratierten Ausstellung mit dem Titel »Dead Already« in New York eigene Arbeiten eher devaluiert und unsere Bilder dort anders zur Disposition gestellt, indem wir den Galerieraum ›einrichteten‹ und die eigentliche Kunst nur am Rande, eben nicht gehängt, sondern gestapelt stattfand. Zusammen mit anderen Objekten boten die Arbeiten eine Kulisse für Tanz-, Musik- und Theorievorstellungen, die sich mit Fragen von Entäußerungen weiblicher Körper als Instrument

»WENN ALLE STRICKE REISSEN, DANN BEHAUPTE ICH, ICH SEI DICHTERIN. DANN TRAGE ICH FÜR EINEN MOMENT DIE NARRENKAPPE.«

ästhetischer Aussagen und Fragen in Bezug auf die Fiktion von Indie-, Underground- und Avantgarde-Genealogien in Downtown Manhattan beschäftigte. Galeristen und Publikum waren auf angenehme Art verunsichert.

Vollziehst du eine Abkehr von der Figur des Malers als autoritärer Instanz?

Vielleicht ist es eine weibliche Herangehensweise im Unterschied zur männlichen? Ich habe in der letzten Ausgabe das Interview mit Albert Oehlen gelesen, in welchem er die Figur des Malerfürsten als für ihn auch emotional noch relevantes Modell anführt. Kim Gordon und ich teilen wahrscheinlich eine Skepsis gegenüber den Rollen, die uns von der Gesellschaft zugewiesen werden – speziell uns als Künstlerinnen. Wir sind eher am Weitergeben, am Teilen, am Fortführen interessiert, kurz: an der sozialen Dimension von kultureller Praxis, und wie die sich auf Formfindung und Form auswirkt, welche Aufgaben sich daraus ergeben, welche Themen. Und wir hinterfragen die Künstlerfigur. Welche ›Performance‹ wird erwartet? Was ist Autorität? Wie kann man imperialen Gestus auseinandernehmen? Wie sich selbst? All dies wirkt in die Selbstwahrnehmung hinein, wirkt sich auf die Figur der ›Malerin‹ aus wie auch auf spezifisch malerische Entscheidungen darüber, was sich dann schließlich konkret ›im Bild‹ abspielt.

Jutta Koether »New Yorker Fenster«, *Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Elisenstraße 4-6, 50667 Köln, die Ausstellung läuft noch bis zum 31. Januar*

Max Dax and Martin Hossbach
Entspannt in den Konjunkturen der Sympathie
Spex, N°318, January—February, 2009, p.106-109.

FRIEZE

Änderungen aller Art II (Garten Köln-Müngersdorf)
(Modifications of All Kinds II (Garden Cologne-Müngersdorf))
2006
Oil on canvas
66×56 cm

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.

Since the early 1980s **Jutta Koether** has been active as a painter, writer and musician, her work in each discipline exerting its influence over the others

by Jan Verwoert

The Days of Our Lives

At the end of the day the most pressing question is how to live your life. It's a difficult one to answer, particularly when you seem to live more than one life and to have more than one face and more than one friend, when you can do more than one thing, and when there are things that you can't seem to do (yet) but that you insist on trying anyway. How do you inhabit the existential condition of your own possibilities and limitations in a culture you share with others? How do you go about celebrating, railing against, transgressing and laughing at your own potential and limitations in the public sphere of that shared culture? What is at stake is an ethics of creating a life for yourself and others that seems worth living, a politics of becoming a voice that speaks not just in the presence of but potentially also *for* and *with* others, and an aesthetics of operating from a position that is embedded in a singular practice of artistic production.

All of these questions are central to the work of Jutta Koether. Since the early 1980s she has been active as a painter, writer and musician, her work in each discipline enough to constitute a career in itself. What makes her approach unique, however, is the way she allows the logic and source material of each of these distinct practices to spill over into the others. Writing infiltrates painting, installations become backdrops for music performances, and various insignia from musical culture are collaged onto canvases. The boundaries between Koether's singular voice and the plurality of voices in the culture she inhabits are subject to constant negotiation. While her style of painting, writing and music can be reclusive and personal to the point of opacity, it can also be highly communicative, involving friends and reaching out to a broad public. Her art expresses personal thoughts and feelings about her work and life and is intimately linked to writing about other people's art and music – which then often results in collaborations with various artists, writers or musicians.

Along with the written reflections, poems and manifestos that crop up in and around her work, Koether is a regular contributor to the German art journal *Texte zur*

Above:
***Musikalischer Liebhaber* (Musical Lover)**
2005
Mixed media on canvas
70×70 cm

Images this page and opposite courtesy: Daniel Buchholz, Cologne

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.

Jutta Koether wrote a column for the music magazine *Spex* as 'Mrs Benway', the fictional wife of William Burroughs' *alter ego*.

Installation view of Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
2006

Kunst and publishes critical essays on alternative music. (Her monthly column that appeared in the music magazine *Spex* throughout the late 1990s was written from the perspective of a 'Mrs Benway', the fictional wife of William Burroughs' *alter ego*.) Reena Spaulings is another persona assumed by Koether, in the collectively written novel *Reena Spaulings* (Bernadette Corporation, 2004). The book comprises the confessions of a young New York urbanite who lives in a ghostly flat and leads a glamorous life dedicated to fashion, art, sex and survival. Koether's own concerts and musical collaborations mostly take the form of 'noise rock' performances; her associates have included Steven Parrino, Tom Verlaine, Kim Gordon and Rita Ackermann. With Gordon and Ackermann she also formed the group Freetime to produce a series of collective paintings for the show *I Love New York* at Museum Ludwig in Cologne in 1998. (New York and Cologne are the two cities that Koether has lived and worked in for many years.)

At the heart of Koether's practice, however, is a distinctive attitude and humour that are indebted to the ethics, politics and aesthetics of – to avoid using the term 'Punk' – a certain critical and celebratory spirit of feeling blessed with the gift of being bad at what you think you do best. This stance is about transcending your own limitations by rigorously pursuing the practical potential of your weaknesses and about allowing the level of noise in your work to rise to the point where sharpness and precision acquire a new meaning because they now emerge, suddenly, in the form of motifs that jump out at you from fuzzy audio-visual textures with the embarrassing directness of an unexpected personal remark. It is also about maintaining a high level of intensity by using an *emphatic* mode of articulating yourself. With Koether, however, this intensity is paired with a humour that reveals itself in the acknowledgement that speaking emphatically means employing rhetorical tropes, assuming dramatic personae and thus 'speaking in tongues' that are not necessarily only your own. Perhaps you could say her stance is about finding authentic ways to inhabit inauthenticity.

Writing this, I am thinking of paintings such as *Homohomo* (2002). Painted in bright shades of yellow,

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.

red and green, the picture shows the sketchy outline of a face with big eyes and curly hair emerging from watery clouds of paint. Rays of coloured light emanate from it, but where the mouth should be there is just an opaque silver square. The oval red shape that could have been a mouth has dropped from the face to the bottom of the picture and sits there flanked by two pink pancake faces with red-rimmed eyes that look surprisingly untouched by the epiphanic explosion above their heads. Koether uses the rhetoric of portrait-painting to full effect, filling the entire canvas with faces. At the same time, however, the cartoonish mask-like counterfeits ridicule the idea of portraiture. A matchstick man/messiah/Madonna figure spouts forth a provocatively empty sign, a sparkling square. This touch of mockery, however, in no way curbs the emotional impact of the picture. The silver square reads like a strong message devoid of content – the painting addresses the viewer in the rhetorical mode of pure emphasis. In its dramatic luminescence it insists on the potential force of something that must be said but whose meaning is unclear; just as, when you hear its title, *Homobomo*, you may not know what it means but you grasp right away that the stakes are doubled. It is like an imploring invocation of the human in whatever form. But it also sounds like a funny, onomatopoeic name for a hitherto unknown creature.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt write: 'Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community. This project leads not toward the naked life of *homo tantum* but toward *homobomo*, humanity squared, enriched by the collective intelligence and love of the community.'[1] Indeed, Koether's portraits are almost always enriched by a variety of characters. Two moon-faces frame the protagonist of *Homobomo*, and in *Mède* (1992) two figures emerge from a thick emerald texture of swooshes and scratchy strokes. One points upwards in a theatrical gesture, while the other clutches her thighs as if to hold herself down. A huge smiley with sun-glasses is painted on top of these figures, so that it looks as if they

Unvollendete Sympathie
(Unfinished Sympathy)
2002
Acrylic on canvas
220×200 cm

Homobomo 2
2002
Acrylic on canvas
190×150 cm

It could be said that Koether's approach is about finding authentic ways to inhabit inauthenticity.

Images this page and opposite courtesy: Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.

are living in its big head. There is a whole social scene happening behind the smiley's shades. Not as emphatically dramatic but no less existential in its humour is *Unvollendete Sympathie* (Unfinished Sympathy, 2002). The picture is covered in translucent blue, red and yellow moon-faces. Their expressions seem neither altogether happy nor entirely sad; these are everyday faces. The outlines of two big yellow eyes hint at the presence of a bigger spectral ego, but it recedes into the background. Instead, the moon-face people take over centre-stage. Surprisingly, this is a comforting vision, implying, as it does, that, however singular you may feel as an individual, you live in the company of many other such singularities in the undramatic conviviality of the everyday.[2]

Living with others outside and inside your head and body is a state that Jean-Luc Nancy calls 'being singular plural' – a mode of being that Koether's work celebrates. 'I will explore you and mine you and you will redraw me according to your will. We shall cross one another's boundaries and make ourselves one nation (J.W.)' are lines scribbled in white letters over the head and across the long hair of a woman without a face drawn in loose, nervous white lines onto the black background of the poster *Need Change (Ladies of the Rope)* (2000). The title refers to a secret society of female members, called The Rope, which convened in Paris in the 1930s to experiment with the spiritualist techniques of G.I. Gurdjieff. The series 'Ladies of the Rope' comprises a set of portraits of female heads without faces framed by quotations and sketched in white scraggy lines on canvases covered in thick black paint. A red strand of wool hangs from a hole in each canvas as if to symbolize a bond whose exact nature, however, remains difficult to determine. It seems like a sinister bond, commemorating the scary moment of letting other people get under your skin. At the same time the portraits are clearly a heartfelt homage to friendship and a strong invocation of an imagined community of clandestine women.

In Koether's recent paintings black is more than a tone, it's a rhetorical trope used to evoke the cultic, clandestine and sinister. *Volume 13* (2005), for instance, is a canvas covered in a flurry of black brushstrokes. On top of the black paint all sorts of glitzy materials are glued to the canvas by a layer of molten glass poured over the picture.

Need Change (Ladies of the Rope)
2000
Acrylic and wool on canvas
112×92 cm

Coronal Holes and the Sunny Ages of Woman
1999
Oil on canvas
182×132 cm

Images this page courtesy: Daniel Buchholz, Cologne

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.

Writing infiltrates painting, installations become backdrops for music performances, and various insignia from musical culture are collaged onto canvases.

There are metal studs, some Monopoly money and the kind of eagles and skull badges that adorn bikers' jackets. *Musikalischer Liebhaber* (Musical Lover, 2005) is a similar composition, but here black chains and a sticker of the Statue of Liberty are also attached. The paintings are like visual sourcebooks for a Kenneth Anger movie. As such, they speak about the immanent intensity of surfaces. In fact, they consist entirely of surfaces – of the canvas, the paint and the glass. Surprisingly, there is life between these layers, a world of signs that promise freedom open up a deep space of lived experience in and among the flat layers of visual texture that the paintings are made of. It makes you see that the meaning of the things and signs that power your dreams and thus shape your life may reside within the infinite depth of their surfaces.

These signs are, of course, tropes of a second-hand visual rhetoric. Still, there is a power in their flatness, and this power is all about the way in which Koether makes them address and touch you. The rhetorical mode of the paintings is geared towards intensifying the visual impact of their content. Yet they also reveal their own rhetoric. By simultaneously imposing and exposing the effects of this rhetoric on and to you, Koether makes you feel how the emotional truth of these signs lies in the way they touch you. How to create this touch, however, is not a matter of rhetorical techniques or recipes. Every body and every mind responds differently to touch. It is rather about finding the right sound by changing it, adding effects, tweaking the filters and raising the noise; and, as such, it is the subject of painting, writing and making music as a continued practice of looking for the right touch.

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1 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2001, p. 204
2 This acknowledgment, I believe, also sets Koether's work apart from that of some of her (male) contemporaries, who felt they had to burn themselves at the stake to authenticate their status as heroic individualists.
3 The poster announced the eponymously titled show at Galerie Buchholz in Cologne, Spring 2000.

Metalist Moment
2006
Performance at
Herald St, London

Courtesy: Herald St, London

Jan Verwoert
The Days of Our Lives
Frieze, N°103, November—December, 2006, p.130-135.