

SUBLIMINAL

In *Subliminal*, this year's cooperative exhibition organized by the GALERIE IG BILDENDE KUNST and AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Lower Austria, Katie Lee and Veronika Hauer's artistic positions form a field of interlinking themes and aesthetic overlaps. Both artists work in the area of conflicting priorities between image, spatial installation, and physical performance. Both Lee and Hauer develop visual and spatial scenarios that not only thematize the body but also subtly summon it to action. Veronika Hauer investigates the body as a medium of mimetic poses; with Katie Lee the body functions essentially as a center of kinesthetic perception.

An essential point of thematic overlap between Hauer and Lee is the critical examination of forms of learning and subliminal conditioning. Learning is by no means restricted here to cognitive forms, but repeatedly involves the entire perceptual apparatus and thus physical, sensory aspects. Veronika Hauer explores how speech influences the body affectively, whereas with Lee, learning pertains to our notion of spatial action in a more general sense. What behavior, which spatial action—for example in a gallery space—is appropriate, what is allowed, what is undesirable, and ultimately, how do the subliminal directives of public dispositifs impact my actions, my own self?

Austrian artist **Veronika Hauer** presents a series of posters that ironically and critically address the teaching of language as well as the link between language and body. Here the series can be read, as it were, as subliminal guidelines for viewers, so that the individual poster represents a performative challenge. Hauer makes use of historical educational imagery since the absurdity of many pedagogical approaches often only become apparent with the distance of time. A sense of unease also contrasts the hint of entertainment, however, given that the drawings of the individual letters formed by children depict regimentation and discipline in a double sense. In addition to the absurdity of reenacting and physically embodying letters, the rigidity of the copperplate engraving reveals the forced nature of this educational enterprise on a second level.

In five poster works from the *MISTY* series, Veronika Hauer makes use of three historical references for representing and depicting the letters of the alphabet. The first level of reference are drawings and prints from W.T. Crane's *An Animated Alphabet*, which appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1861. Crane depicted children interacting with animals and objects in entertaining ways. Here, bodies form letters together with objects, which not infrequently leads to an almost absurd, performative scene. The initial, seemingly playful undertaking, however, only poorly obscures the pedagogical aims of a highly insistent learning method based on physical-mimetic reenactment. The second reference level in *MISTY* is the work of Crane's namesake, the English artist and children's book illustrator Walter Crane (1845–1915), who worked his way through alliterations of individual letters in his children's book *The Absurd ABC*. Hauer adopts this "motif-based" approach and applies it to the five letters of her posters, creating for the letter M, for example, the alliteration "Miss Muddy who managed my motel and molded three mice in the mouth of her mistress." Serving as a third historical reference is the learning game *Hurra, wir lesen! Hurra, wir schreiben*, created by Austrian painter, children's book author, and illustrator Tom Seidmann-Freud (1892-1930). The shapes of alphabetic characters are not explored narratively here, but by means of formal analogies where objects from the immediate environment are investigated for their letter-like shapes. The author deliberately works with a reduced representational style, so that "hidden" letters can be more easily recognized. The letters are distilled and interpreted, so to speak, out of the surrounding environment.

Veronika Hauer works with a reference structure that totally overwhelms the viewer in order to undercut the particular learning method and take it to an absurdist extreme. In so doing, the textual level (Walter Crane) begins mediating between the two representational modes of the alphabet (W.T. Crane and Tom Seidmann-Freud) in a poly-semantic

and intertextual manner. The poetic textual level Hauer developed in reference to Crane—the rhyme-like alliterations of M, I, S, T, and Y—initiates a de-semantic chain of associations that counteracts all didactic diction, thus asserting itself into the daily life of the viewer today. Apart from this conceptual and image- and text-based interpretation, the poster works can also be understood as the “score” for a potential performance, as the basic framework for exploratory movements in space. This potential performance would be another, non-affirmative and amimetic form of embodying language devoted entirely to subjective and aesthetic appropriation.

Australian artist **Katie Lee** explores the performative potential of sculptural forms. Lee sees space not as a static structure, but as a dynamic, mutable system. In installations and performative dispositifs, the artist questions and investigates structures for disciplining and at times also “securing” the body. In *Subliminal*, for example, a frame resembling orphaned gymnastics equipment functions not as an independent sculptural form but rather as a subtle challenge/invitation to the body. The isolation of the objects and constellations—which seem post-minimal at first glance—and the surrounding empty space have an evocative effect on how space is imagined and in fact negotiated. The artist does not attempt to influence the ways in which her installations are perceived with dramaturgical intentionality, but to preserve in a subtle way, through their configuration, a random or unscripted aspect.

Katie Lee’s aesthetic practice cannot be reduced to exhibition spaces and scenarios, although the artist fully uses the White Cube as a system for directing the viewer’s attention and the production of meaning, since it is significantly bound to conventions and “choreographs” to a significant degree the perceiving subject both physically and mentally. Here, Lee operates along the boundary lines of the dispositif (White Cube), which essentially generates meaning through separation and aesthetic distancing, fundamentally calling into question the binary relationship between representation and non-representation. At what point does a peripheral object, such as a steel framework or a simple cable, switch from being a functional object to an aesthetically autonomous object for viewing; conversely, at what point does an aesthetic, seemingly autonomous object begin to trigger potential actions. With Lee, presentation and representation are not opposites, but embody a fluid transition.

At first glance, Lee’s objects make no real sense; the objects seem almost helplessly exposed. But the ostensible dysfunctionality of the frames and objects alone, in conjunction with the room’s almost palpable emptiness, turns it into an invitation to viewers to harness and make the spatial structure their own. The frames have, on the surface, a structuralist, post-minimalist look, that slowly gives way to a diffuse form of functionality. This is because—in terms of acting—Lee’s frame-like structure offers ample opportunities for interaction; the frames might, for example, invite viewers to hang them up or install them. In every instance, they exemplify the possibility for spatial change. Seemingly so profane at first glance, the frames and structures harbor a certain power; bound up in them, as Lee describes it, is an affective energy that seeks to evoke a bodily response in the viewer.

Lee’s dispositif-like installations seek to play through spatial possibilities, to test out possible gestures and sequences of actions in the space. Actual and imaginary actions do not form contrasts here, but simply occur simultaneously. The artist examines spatial behavior in disciplinary spaces, apparatuses, and dispositifs not in an abstract or formalistic way, but under the auspices of cultural and socio-aesthetics. She understands spatial behavior as a repertoire of subtly codified behavioral patterns, which, similar to rhetorical figures, subliminally influence the consciousness that co-constitutes our behavior in a highly un- and semi-conscious manner. This repertoire of possible actions therefore always proves to be preformatted; the body inscribes them, even though these “covert” directives and demands are unconscious in nature and prove to be internalized.

The questioning of the connection between and the transition from representation to presentation, from viewing to action, finally condenses into the question of what performance is per se. At what point do banal, situational actions

become an aesthetic event, when do they culminate in the performative? For Katie Lee, it is entirely possible to think about performance that does not deliberately address viewers as radical, and what's more, the "performance without audience" is even an integral part of her work. In very few instances is her audience the frontally addressed crowd; instead Lee focuses on the potential, random, and peripheral viewer. She is not simply questioning the conditions of the gaze, of what's presented, but the rules of participation. Who is allowed to play a role in the performative. Who is artist, who is audience, who is included, who is excluded.

The video format, marking the installation's outer edge with a freely suspended screen facing the street, not only forms the "public" interface but also acts as a feedback for potential actions in the installation space. It is an essential instrument for activating the viewer; he or she is not intended to merely remain in the act of perceiving, of contemplating, but to overcome the ideal, typical space of abstractness (White Cube) in favor of a space of action, the appropriating of spatial and processual dimensions. The installation's visually lifeless initial impression is thus counterposed with a "warm," action-based and relational facet. Lee is in no way striving for a directed, choreographed performance but is instead seeking to create a scenario evocative of actions, one that, in an entirely incidental way, conducts visitors towards a polysemic space of potential actions. In this way, the post-minimalist exhibition scenario at the outset transforms into a potential stage, into a fundamentally performative dispositif. Ultimately, over the course of the exhibition, the visual inspections and actions of performers in the space are intended to take up these subtle, subliminal challenges to the viewer, putting "themselves" to the test here. Video recordings of these performative inspections planned on two afternoons are intended to form a kind of "reentry" that seeks not to instruct or demonstrate but to explore aesthetically and thus educate in the best sense possible sensorily and aesthetically.

Veronika Hauer and Katie Lee investigate forms that influence kinaesthetic actions and subliminally choreograph the body. Hauer's absurdist historical representations and Lee's object structures trigger a latent sense of unease in the viewer. Not infrequently they arouse memories, even physical responses to one's own experiences of body conditioning, and thus of the mental apparatus familiar to us from school, the sports field, and public space. In *Subliminal*, this mnemonic dimension, that is the purely physical memory of conditioning and training, the response to body-shaping "devices," represent the actual, albeit invisible material of Veronika Hauer's and Katie Lee's work practices.

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