



REVIEW - 27 MAY 2017



Around Town: Basel

Various venues

BY MORITZ SCHEPER

Once a year, for Art Basel, the circus comes to town, but otherwise this city, positioned at the border between Switzerland, Germany and France, is not thought of as a contemporary art hotspot. Especially, some might say, when compared to Zurich. Not so! As well as its excellent institutions, a number of fresh and hungry

young galleries are now relocating to the city. After all, it might prove easier to get noticed here, plus the rents are moderate – by Swiss standards, that is.

Last year, for example, Freymond-Guth made the move from Zurich, taking up residence in a Herzog & de Meuron-designed brutalist showroom with no natural light. In preparation for her recent exhibition 'Sun Up Moon Down', Canadian artist Megan Rooney, who supplements her painterly practice with a playful, performative approach, locked herself in this cave for three weeks, producing all of the work for the show on site. Expressive gestural murals, rendered in a subdued pastel palette and littered with small figurative jokes, attempt to gain the upper hand over the concrete. Interlocking shades of red, pink and tan hint figuratively at breasts, hands and arms, collectively pointing towards the female body. The motivation behind this reference remains a little unclear, however, highly accomplished are the recent series of magazine paintings, for which Rooney has painted child-like distortions of femininity over the top of various high-gloss fashion spreads.



Maria Loboda, 'Havoc in the Heavenly Kingdom', 2017, installation detail at Kunsthalle Basel. Courtesy: the artist and Kunsthalle Basel

Itziar Okariz's latest exhibition also does without daylight, presented in the basement at Kunsthaus Baselland. Although the Bilbao and Madrid-based performance artist ordinarily works within the discourse surrounding gender and identity politics, such conversations are only represented here by *To Pee in Public or Private Spaces* (2001–04). The film depicts Okariz herself, standing up and urinating in various public zones (in a subway station; on the Brooklyn Bridge), sullyng the norm of cleanliness as it applies to the desirable female body with the self-assured male gesture of peeing wherever, whenever. In Okariz's more recent works, blunt rhetoric has been replaced by a more poetic approach. This is evident in the installation *Diary of Dreams: 22nd November 2016 – 11th January 2017* (2017), which sees 57 pages from the artist's dream journal reproduced on large-scale paper sheets. The majority remain empty aside from a date (presumably the artist remained dreamless), but others depict Okariz's dreams in word pictures-cum-concrete poems, formal representations of the emotions, fears and the general confusion that we experience when we sleep. Two loudspeakers play recordings of Okariz reading these fragments, the overlapping of the two reinforcing the inaccessible character of this very private chronicle.

With her exhibition 'Havoc in the Heavenly Kingdom', fittingly located on the upper floor of the Kunsthalle Basel, Maria Loboda engages in karma detox and un-jinxing. The carpet on the staircase turns out to be an installation entitled *Trample Your Atavistic Ennui into this Sisal Rug* (all works 2017) – as is so often the case with Loboda, it is the title that makes the work. The main hall is dominated by three large gates: *Hypothetical Reconstruction of a Gateway*. The gates are painted in three shades approximating the grey-green hue of the celadon ceramics that were popular amongst royalty in the Middle Ages, because they were said to turn black on contact with poison. There is plenty more danger: on one of the gates stands a Molotov cocktail (*Note the Incendiary Weapon on the Left Ledge of the Third Gate*), while the ceiling

frieze shows the ominous outline of a black sun (*Raw Material Coming from Heaven*). With the eloquent nonchalance of *Mrs. Van Hopper*, however, Loboda ironizes these numinous powers, locating within a luxurious tin of cream in which a cigarette has been stubbed out – a gesture borrowed from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940) – the barbarism that resides within the inner circle of wealth and elegance.



<<https://frieze.com/academy>>

On the other side of the Rhine, the young gallery Weiss Falk is presenting Lucky DeBellevue’s ‘An Error Occurred’, the white walls of which are partly covered with fading black confetti-like patterns, created by gradually deinking stamps. The numerous works on paper (*Various Titles*, 2016–17) and three rather comical wooden sculptures (*Weiss Falk*, *Self Portrait*, and *XY and Backward Z*, all 2017) are upstaged by DeBellevue’s humorous series of block prints on linen – or ‘praintings’, as he calls them. The blurry imperfections that arise from this manual printing technique are overlaid here with random snippets of information: lottery numbers and social media buttons (Facebook’s ‘send’ toggle) as well as references to Calder and Kollwitz. As if to further mock the cliché of artistic decision-making’s arbitrariness, DeBellevue also sticks pistachio shells to his canvases, a waste product of procrastination. This works especially well in *Send* (2017), a linen on which a turquoise camouflage pattern has been superimposed over a blue-black background, and then overlaid with diagonal rows of shells and horizontal rows of grey-green dots. This quirky highlighting of one’s own untimeliness, in terms of one’s choice of techniques and

materials, is incredibly charming, humorous and somehow warm.
Definitely artist's artist material.

Main image: Megan Rooney, 'Sun Up Moon Down', 2017, installation view at Freymond-Guth. Courtesy: the artist and Freymond-Guth, Basel

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REVIEW

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