

with arched eyebrows raised in scepticism. What is being met with such distrust? Work ethic, social structures, the practice of art-making itself?

Normally applied as a political tool of marginalization, the term NEET takes on a more ambiguous connotation when Janitzky and Schmidlein employ it in relation to themselves. While it may be applicable to the young artists, who are operating outside of the formal structure of, say, art education, it's a complicated analogy to use in a show full of knowingly gestural clichés. Not only because of the cultural gap between its relation to a British underclass and the relative wealth of the Bavarian capital, but also because it implies a lack of ambition, insinuating they share this attitude as artists at the beginning of their practices. On the contrary, Munich has an active young art scene populated with artists like Janitzky and Schmidlein. Both often collaborate within a wider network while Janitzky co-runs the off-space Lothringer_13.

The ideas and intentions behind 'it's just a way to survive' / 'Zukunftswahn' hinted at a consciousness of the social structures in which the artists themselves live and work. There was certainly a self-awareness and an inkling of shrewd observation, hovering somewhere between judgement and craft. Sometimes this came across as offhand, while at other points it homed in on particulars, such as the manifestation of lifestyles through objects. In this respect, the most convincing pieces in the show were Janitzky and Schmidlein's two collaboratively made sculptural installations *O.T* and *n.e.e.t* (both 2013). The former consisted of a small wooden table upon which were arranged cardboard facsimiles of books – possibly works of classical literature yet devoid of content. Display and ornamentation prevailed, but with so much emphasis on emptiness, what was left, other than a kitsch rendering of bourgeois taste and cultural appetites?

There were points of encouragement to be found here, where Janitzky and Schmidlein's works seemed to become affective installations with more ambition and more passion for the form that the artists use to communicate their ideas. Certainly, their DIY approach begins to breach codified arrangements of object and material, but I would have liked to see them as haptic environments in which these lifestyles are emulated, questioned, felt and edified.

SAIM DEMIRCAN

1
Christopher Knecht
'Monday Shrimp Club', 2013,
installation view

2
Stephan Janitzky
and Max Schmidlein, 'it's just
a way to survive /
Zukunftswahn', 2013,
installation view

3
Foreground:
Alina Szapocznikow, *Fiancée
folle blanche*, (Crazy
White Bride), 1971, resin,
46 × 26 × 22 cm
Background: Annette Messenger,
Hotel / Fiction,
2010, metal and nets,
dimensions variable

ANNETTE MESSEGER & ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, Berlin

Alina Szapocznikow and Annette Messenger were born almost 20 years apart, in Poland and France, respectively. During the 1960s, however, both lived in the district of Malakoff in Paris and, in the words of gallerist Isabella Czarnowska, 'This show is about their friendship.' 'North of the Future' brought together sculpture and drawing by the two artists, dating from 1955 to the present day. Curated by Messenger, the exhibition comprised three rooms that established a loose formal dialogue between the artists' works. The corporeal sculptural language employed by the two artists is disparate: Szapocznikow's oscillation between abstraction and figuration is rooted in Modernism, while Messenger's work engages with the later framework of Conceptualism. But both artists challenge reductive perceptions of gender and, more specifically, womanhood, through an exploration of the body.

The image of the phallus as a counter-symbol to female subjectivity book-ended the show, which opened with Szapocznikow's *Fiancée folle blanche* (Crazy White Bride, 1971) and ended with Messenger's *Fetischism* (2013). Crafted using resin and netting, the former recalls Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* (1647–52) in its smooth, white perfection. Body arched and head thrown back, the line between pleasure and pain is uncertain as the woman's face appears to have dissolved in its proximity to a dominant pink phallus. A comparable, albeit less subtle, fetishization is suggested by Messenger's flesh-coloured latex dildo, violently protruding from a black stiletto heel, presenting a relationship between aggressively erect symbols of male and female sexuality.

Inscribed upon the wall in the first room, Messenger's *Hotel / Fiction* (2010) oscillated between sculpture and drawing, symbiotically connecting the two; the words are delineated using black netting, and seem to be dripping or bleeding. Her proximate drawing, *Chance* (2012), appears to violently haemorrhage. The body's suffering and vulnerability is conveyed, which perhaps suggests the viewer's own misery when confronted with the stark, painful reality of our inevitable physical impermanence. For me, these drawings recall Szapocznikow's intimate letters to Messenger, written while she was in hospital in 1972, which Messenger reproduced in the catalogue for the 2010 exhibition 'Alina Szapocznikow' at Kunstparterre, Munich. In this correspondence, Szapocznikow described her physical trauma resulting from breast cancer, painting a picture between word and image: 'The woman 50 cm to my left [...] is now spitting blood [...] + she has her period + she vomits.' These letters were unfortunately absent from this exhibition, leaving viewers to search for their own connections.

The symbolism of the fragmented corpus was explored in the exhibition's second room. A major element in Szapocznikow's *oeuvre* was the casting of her own body, and in *Untitled (Prototype)* (1966) her lips appear as a severed, organic form. Duplicated mouths fuse, resting back to back, their plump sensuality and s

eductive lightness accentuated in candy-coloured pink. More violent in its intent, Messenger's *Trois Fusils* (Three Guns, 2007), is studded with constellations of black and white badges depicting body parts (toes, tongues, teeth), while *6 Dissections* (1997) sees toy animals flayed and pinned to the wall, their entrails removed. Brutal and disturbing, the work is cruel yet darkly humorous. Messenger utilizes media that suggest childhood and, by proxy, motherhood – tainted objects that signify a nostalgic space coloured by psychological unease and empty, disfigured memories.

Messenger dedicated the third room solely to Szapocznikow, highlighting her exploration of material, balance and mass within the context of body politics. Sculptures ranged from early works like *Ponytail (Portrait of a Mexican Woman)* (1955–6) – for which Szapocznikow produced heads and busts as part of a Social Realist doctrine, and even made a monument to Stalin – to later sculptures depicting anthropomorphic forms in flux. During the 1960s, Szapocznikow radically pushed the boundaries of artistic media. While recalling the traditional medium of bronze, *La Ronde* (The Round, 1968), for example, utilizes polyurethane, with ambiguous folds of asexual human flesh mercurially floating in an amorphous pool in which the body is either emerging or dissolving.

Art historians have repeatedly assessed Szapocznikow's practice through her biography; as a Holocaust survivor who died from a cancer that physically deformed her, there are clear connections to explore. Likewise, theorist Julia Kristeva has described how Messenger 'travels her self' through her work, conceptually moulding and merging a sense of her own time, memory, mind and body. 'North of the Future' subverted this tendency to reduce women artists to their biographies, and instead considered thematic overlaps, attempting to let the works speak for themselves. This created the potential for the *oeuvres* of these artists to shed a formal light upon one another. However, at times their work felt incompatible – Messenger's playful forms made certain pieces by Szapocznikow seem tame. Unfortunately, very little of real pertinence was conveyed regarding these women's intriguing friendship. But then, when it comes to relationships, perhaps we can never really know what goes on behind closed doors.

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