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jevouspropose#16

Maria Ceppi

Elisabeth Bronfen vous propose Maria Ceppi

Exhibition: 28 February – 5 May, 2024

For jevouspropose#16, Elisabeth Bronfen (cultural critic, author and curator) proposes the artist Maria Ceppi (*1963, lives and works in Valais, Switzerland).

On the occasion of the exhibition at jevouspropose, Maria Ceppi (MC) and Elisabeth Bronfen (EB) had a conversation:

EB: We are showing two different but interconnected groups of works by you. One contains the small objects that you call *Objets Cultes*, and the other the large sculptures that you call *Hybrid Shapes*.

MC: For both groups of works, I am interested in the small objects that we constantly have around us in everyday life. Their significance, but also the value we assign to them. By coupling the objects together and combining them into something new, I try to break up common systems of value and norms. For me, it's also about a form of emancipation, for example questioning traditional gender roles or the use of the color pink in gender binaries. How do we give things, as well as functions, a new value and a new recognition?

EB: Let's first talk about the large sculptures, the *Hybrid Shapes*. You often use household objects, as for example in the sculpture *After Work*, 2022. Here, you have hugely enlarged a rubber glove, typically used for cleaning, and turned it inside out. By choosing the color pink, you have made it a traditionally feminine glove. On the one hand, we see the inside of the glove, the part that becomes slightly damp and disgusting during prolonged cleaning because the material of the glove sticks to the fingers. On the other hand, it lies on a jewelry box, in which you keep something very valuable. Thus you mix two things: something that is rather dirty, that protects the hand and that you put away afterwards and a jewelry box that is intended for storing valuable items. It is also interesting to see how the cleaning glove unfolds in your sculpture: namely into a flower, perhaps a rose or even the female sex. What is decisive for this perception is not only that two different things come together to form a new whole, but also that you enlarge them to a great extent, monumentalizing them so to speak, and that you emphasize the interplay of materials.

MC: Indeed, I often use materials other than the original ones, sometimes I am even reversing them. Something that originally comes from nature can be made with artificial materials and vice versa. For me, it's about visual perception as well as content, and always about memory. What does something remind me of? What could it have been? What was it? Then there is also the haptic dimension when you touch the sculpture. The book *Über-Empfindlichkeit. Spielformen der Idiosynkrasie* by Silvia Bovenschen has had a significant influence on my work. I find the phenomenon of idiosyncrasy very interesting, the fact that one can develop a strong aversion to insignificant details. These moments are very important in my large sculptures. They give them autonomy, they become beings in their own right, so they are no longer just objects.

EB: They are figures in several senses of the word. By assembling the most diverse things, they become something alive. In your works, the boundary between the animate and the inanimate becomes fluid. But at the same time, the notion of the uncanny would not fit. Normally, something that

oscillates between the living and the non-living triggers an uncomfortable, disturbing feeling because one cannot distinguish whether it is alive or not. But your works also feel very cheerful to me.

MC: That might have to do with me as a person. The idea is to give them their value, often in an ironic and critical way. That a hose clamp or a cleaning rag can also be beautiful and valuable. Be it in use or simply in interaction with other things. And then the dialogue they have with ourselves, the conversation that moves from body to body, is very important to me. During production, I pay close attention to the fact that the things preserve their traces of use and thus their character, even when enlarged. It must be absolutely perfect. It's precisely this irritation or idiosyncrasy that interests me. That's why, for example, I took great care to ensure that the shard in the sculpture *Wattersol*, 2023 was produced with all its cracks. Of course, the change in perception brought about by the oversize is also very exciting. When the glove suddenly becomes an organ or a flower. But I would also like it if we no longer had to talk about which things were the starting point. The play of confusion between memory and perception makes up so much of our lives. But we rarely allow for this confusion. We always want to categorize everything. Everything must have a reason. When enlarging, it is therefore important for me to find the tipping point. That moment when one thing can be several things and have several meanings. A constant back and forth. The play with ambivalence.

EB: Let's talk briefly about the *Objets Cultes*.

MC: In contrast to the *Hybrid Shapes*, I speak here of the hand dialogue. I leave the pieces in their original size and recombine them. By taking a piece out of its norm and combining it with another piece, I de-normalize them, I take away their normality.

EB: Your *Objets Cultes* also made me think of Donna Haraway and her thoughts formulated in the book *Staying with the Trouble*. There she imagines a political project of assemblage, in which humans, animals and nature come together as an overall structure to form a new, less destructive co-inhabitation, which establishes itself as a non-hierarchized interweaving in the fragile, vulnerable world. It is her contribution to the critique of the Anthropocene, that is, the world entirely occupied by the human hand. Your work is also about questioning relationships and building new ones. You explore how things from nature, things from industry, and everyday objects come together in new ways. In contrast to what Donna Haraway is interested in, you are of course dealing with aesthetic creations. The assembling of different objects and materials, which then result in new shapes, has to do a lot with wit. But not witty in the sense of funny. Rather in the way wit is known in German-speaking countries, namely from the romantic irony of German authors who wrote at the turn of the 19th century. But there is always something ironic in your way of reshaping. Whereby irony here means taking on, and creating, a certain distance. So, there is not only the joyful, composite aspect of pop art in your work, but there is also your wit that forces us to think; to engage, to react, and respond to the art in front of us. Your *Hybrid Shapes* and *Objets Cultes* attract us - through the materials, through the colors - but at the same time, there is a distance because we realize that something has been put together here. It's also about an intellectual game. Moreover, with the *Objets Cultes* as with the *Hybrid Shapes*, I have the feeling that they are figures. And I can immediately imagine stories for these figures. They are staged. They actually create a scene by the very fact that they are put together. In other words, what Virginia Woolf calls "scene making". That's what immediately attracted me to your work.

Elisabeth Bronfen

Elisabeth Bronfen is a cultural critic, author and curator. Since 2023 Emerita of the University of Zurich, she is still Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. She has written numerous articles and books in the fields of literature and visual culture, femininity and death, cross-mapping as a hermeneutic process, TV dramas, Shakespeare, and seriality. She works as a curator and writes for exhibition catalogs. She is also the author of the cooking memoir "Obsessed" (Rutgers University Press) and the novel "Händler der Geheimnisse" (Limmat Verlag)

Maria Ceppi

Maria Ceppi is a visual artist based in Valais, Switzerland. The wide repertoire of her art production extends from small scale works on paper to monumental installations and sculptures. She is concerned with the everyday poetry which she discovers in unassuming tools, gadgets, materials we surround ourselves with. These objects become heroes of stories and find themselves disassembled and brought together in astonishing new constellations. Though seemingly purposeless and alienated, they retain stories of their origins and thus create new narrative potentials of the uncanny and absurd through this act of re-composition and reveal an autonomous sculptural presence.

jevouspropose

jevouspropose is a curatorial series by Sabina Kohler and accomplices. Several times a year, *jevouspropose* invites a personality to propose an artist with a specific group of works. The works will be installed in the space of *jevouspropose*, celebrated with an opening and remain on view for a while. At the same time, the respective presentation is expanded and continued in virtual space: on the *jevouspropose* Instagram account, the proposer and the artist will have a chat, a visual ping-pong on the works and themes on display.