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Lars Laumann

Morrissey Foretelling the Death of Diana (2006)
Installation view at Kunstneres Hus, Oslo (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and Kunstneres Hus, Oslo

Jemma Egan

Don't get fresh with me (detail; 2016)
Installation view at Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and Zabłudowicz Collection, London
Photography by Tim Bowditch

Cornelia Baltes

"Drunk Octopus Wants to Fight"
Installation view at Limoncello, London (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist and Limoncello, London
Photography by Andy Keate



Jemma Egan

Zabłudowicz Collection / London

In her show at the Zabłudowicz Collection in London, Jemma Egan examines food as commodity: its production, packaging, presentation and promotion. The exhibition is titled "It Means More to Me than Most People" — a quote pulled from a documentary on the Pizza Hut restaurant chain, in which an employee expresses his profound attachment to the product he sells. Egan too seems to express a reluctance to poke fun at her subject matter investigating instead the depths of our complicity with consumer capitalism.

The dominant work in Egan's three-piece exhibition is *Porkies* (2016), a series of clusters of soothing pink silicone rubber tubes arranged evenly around the room, resting on benches along the wall or dangling, like jungle vegetation, from exposed beams in the ceiling. However, the name of the sculpture-installation betrays a subtle antagonism: the pastel pink (closely resembling Pamela Rozenkranz's sea of standardized Northern European skin tone at last year's Venice Biennial) insists on a simultaneous signification of pigskin and, thus, the horrors of the mechanized meat industry. This clash of positive and negative signifiers in the highly designed commodity marks the archetypal ambivalence in the consumer. Egan notes Barthes' essay "Ornamental Cookery" as having particularly influenced her research.

A mural that takes up one whole wall of the room is revealed, on closer inspection (also of the press release), to be made with baby oil on untreated MDF. It depicts fragmented mouths of smiley faces half agape, reproduced serially à la Warhol's silkscreen process, leaving or even accentuating the faults of the printing method — suggesting a pop sensibility that aligns Egan with a historical tradition of engaging the consumer product in the artwork. With her uniquely visceral sculptural vocabulary, this recently graduated artist has much to say about the intersecting aesthetic and ethical implications of contemporary consumerism.

by Jeppe Ugelvig

Cornelia Baltes

Limoncello / London

The title of Cornelia Baltes's exhibition "Drunk Octopus Wants to Fight" comes from a photograph that went viral on the Internet — an image of a coat hook-cum-inebriated angry octopus. Baltes's nine small-to-mid-scale paintings oscillate between the tropes of abstraction and figuration, shifting depending on how you see these signifiers.

Many of her shapes are corporeal, recalling long limbs, bottoms, boobs, fingers or nails. These are painted in a caricatured and witty — even bawdy — style. Works such as *Greg* or *Fin* (both 2016) suggest anthropomorphic portraits of body parts. In *Steve* (2015) we are reminded of the eponymous drunk octopus with two sucker-bearing arms of cornflower blue; equally, two buttocks in a pair of jelly-like jeans are cheekily suggested (pun intended). *Cindy* (2016) sees trashy false fingernails depicted in neon orange that graduates into canary yellow, fingers interlaced and outlined in white against black — or perhaps these are psychedelically glowing sperms.

Referring to markings from the artist's sketchbook, her once spontaneous gestures have been refined and reproduced upon canvas and colored MDF. Smooth, two-dimensional forms sit on the surface plane devoid of any sense of the artist's touch; seemingly uniform, upon closer inspection, sections of MDF have been hollowed out with a router, emptiness looking like black paint. The effect is discombobulating and funny, opening up the void-like space behind the "flat" painting (à la Lucio Fontana, though with entirely different intentions).

Evoking a playful mood, Baltes's practice feels joyful: black squiggles dance between yellow arches; baby pink circles glide through a graduated-blue tube, like bubble-gum platelets. Following the art-historical precedents of Philip Guston's cartoonish manner or David Shrigley's humor, Baltes enables a reassessment of everyday objects, even our own bodies, through a spirited lightness. Try to see her work and not smile; you'll struggle.

by Louisa Elderton

Lars Laumann

Kunstneres Hus / Oslo

It's a good thing that the last day of Lars Laumann's exhibition at Kunstneres Hus coincides with the artist's opening at the gallery VI, VII. Because it takes a little pathos out of the concept of a mid-career retrospective that the show at Kunstneres Hus presents itself as. It is already eight years since his surprisingly touching tale of tragic love, *Berlinmuren* (2008), made a considerable splash at the 5th Berlin Biennale; and already ten since his quirky tour de force of editing and fanboydom, *Morrissey Foretelling the Death of Diana* (2006), first garnered international attention.

Their attraction hasn't worn thin, but it is rewarding seeing those now-historical pieces in relation to his more recent work, which is less invested in the kind of novelty that helped those earlier works gain notice. One can follow the trajectory of an already quite accomplished artist as he hones his focus on the relevant aspects of his narratives — a sincere investment in a very specific story, but paired with an acute awareness of a larger geopolitical situation — as seen in *Prima Secunda Africa!* (2014), an exploration of African and Nordic coastal landscapes and the trading of Norway's earliest global export, stockfish.

This evolution also informs the publication that accompanied the exhibition, available not in print but online as a free download. Presenting the texts in the films, the book establishes that Laumann not only finds exceptional, too-good-to-be-true tales, but that he is a convincing and sincerely empathic storyteller. In its focus on the texts, the book allows the viewer to become a reader, to delve into both their poetic subtleties and slapstick moments, where the mundane reverberates with the existential. "I just want to be myself," is the protagonist's conclusion in Laumann's most recent and maybe most accomplished project, *Season of Migration to the North* (2015). As a refugee from Sudan, he compares his experience to those in the diaries of a young Jewish woman fleeing Nazi Austria for Oslo. It leaves the viewer and reader curious — but also anxious — for what will come next.

by Andreas Schlaegel