



"Punishment + Decoration," installation view, 1994

"PUNISHMENT + DECORATION"

Hohenthal and Bergen, Cologne
April 8 - May 28, 1994

An extreme but calculated superficiality forms the basis of this show, curated by critic and theorist Michael Corris. The works were arranged in a manner more usually associated with the display of craft objects. In the close-up space of the gallery, the seemingly neglected practice of treating art works as decoration pieces was intentionally irritating. Historical works like a tableau by Lucio Fontana or one of Yves Klein's sponges were installed self-consciously, either on an easel or in direct proximity to paintings by Olivier Mosset or Sylvie Fleury/John Armleder. This layered arrangement created amazing constellations. One of Anya Gallaccio's chocolate pieces supports a work by Elisabeth Heller, which is in turn juxtaposed with two Xi Jianjuns, all presided over by a Jan Dibbets.

Dutch artist Lily van der Stokker occupies a whole wall with her flower-power dreams of transcending to a better world, but finds herself confronted with one of Imi Knoebel's disruptive "allover" visual assaults. The pierced eyes of a Byzantine icon, perched on an easel in the middle of the space, effectively evoke the topic of the exhibition—punishment by decoration.

Although this exhibition was staged in Europe, it is a profoundly American show. Its rather disrespectful handling of the art works is in no way typically Continental. Indeed, it highlights the complete lack of correspondence between the New World preoccupation with the critic, and the Old World concern with the artist. The meaning and integrity of the single work is consciously ignored. Yet, the viewer who expects a show like an irritating MTV video clip will be disappointed. The consumption of art after television is still a very different matter. As Corris declares in the catalogue essay:

"In retrospect, it seems obvious that any survey of the tensions presumed to have shaped painting after Minimalism and Conceptual Art would necessarily include an inquiry into the fate of painting's self-image as a representative, if not privileged, cultural practice... for those who hold to a covert essentialism of artistic forms, painting was dead. To others, the future of painting seems to be in the direction of a determined self-estrangement from its glorious Modernist past." Regardless of whether or not this is apparent, "Punishment + Decoration" is a fresh, alive-'n'-kicking revue, even a parody of pictorial strength. And as the French say, "what or who you love, you don't respect."

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