

Anne Neukamp

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Encore et déjà

Anne Neukamp's Painted Plea for an In-Between

An over-sized, dusky pink cloth serviette that has been folded four times over is introduced into the picture space from the right. Beneath this, so it would seem, an indefinable black being has got itself stuck - almost as if in a slapstick scene - or is hiding itself behind the larger-than-life length of fabric, and while trying to make off to the back it has plainly forgotten to remove its extremities, its tail or wings from our sight. The pale backdrop to this curious scene, as captured in Anne Neukamp's painting *Saum [Seam]*, 2010, is flaking off in several places. Old coats of paint appear to the light of day and indicate what is behind, while in the lower left-hand corner a further picture plane bulges out.

Anne Neukamp's painting distinguishes itself by a collage-like multilayering of spaces and references that presents itself to the beholder in baffling compositions and, as can hardly be overlooked, in large formats that are free of the retro-fads of the 2000s with their decorative deadweight. Ambiguity runs like a thread through her painting, in which she allows differing painting techniques as well as both abstract and narrative or figurative images to communicate with and flow into one another.

Time and again *Now* and then everything *Simultaneously* - the conclusion of the often long-winded process of painting is marked by a visual construction, a veritable palimpsest which encompasses in the one and the same panel information from diverse, more or less overlapping layers and thus from any number of progressively staggered visual elements. The painter conjures up this impression by granting a view of previously painted strata through sections of painting on individual layers that either she has wiped away or that have detached themselves. This she does by working with semi-transparent coats of paint or by applying layers that direct the viewer's eye to what is below precisely by virtue of the fact that they do not extend over the whole of the canvas. After already having taken a look, one wishes to accompany the artist's mental and work processes through to the back, setting out from the final *Now* which Neukamp at some point chose as the concluding notation for the notorious dialectics in her creative production - a permanent weighing up between adding new elements and returning to what has already been painted.

In this final *Now* - whose spent, washed-out character is quite symptomatic, for it is the result of the specific procedure in her creative production - Neukamp presents clearly recognisable representational motifs which she has appear as clichéd pointers to reality that refer just as equally to the abstract, graphic realities that are present. These motifs heighten the at times muted mood and colours of the paintings, for they allude allegorically to classic symbols of melancholy and vanitas. Thus in *Entracte* or *Untitled* from 2010, the heavy curtains that drape themselves with decorative coquettishness down the side of the picture pick up on and prolong the game with the various picture levels, forming a reflexive element in the sense of an ironic aperçu. In *Spiegel [Mirror]*, 2009 and *Untitled*, 2010, we see the elegant oval of a mirror whose mysterious reflections point to realms uncertain, while in *Smoke*, 2010, our eye is directed to a smoky patch of mist which, in its inflatedness, threatens to obscure all about it while extending an unmistakable invitation for the gaze to dally there. *Grape*, 2010, presents us ultimately with the opportunity to marvel at a plump, oversized grape that is running riot over the picture panel. Neukamp brings a further level of meaning into play when, apart from schematic fragments of landscapes, she also allows references to stylised "personalities" from comics or advertising pictographs to enter the visual action, as is especially clear in *Rosette*, 2010, where a wraithlike depiction of a comic sequence features at the centre of a plushy length of gathered cloth, rather like an *appliqué*. The diffuse presence of a figure who can be considered an "actor" or "agent", or even the hint of a ghostly shadow is already sufficient for the viewer to transform the perfunctory scene into a stage-like event and take it as the overture to a story that will end in paradox.

The Pop Art produced by Roy Lichtenstein, whose painting *Mirror #1*, 1969 - itself an adaptation of an ad - Neukamp appropriated for her *Spiegel*, 2009, is doubtlessly an important reference for her work, given that found visuals such as postcards or advertising stickers play a major part in it. For their often emblematic "efficacy" - which employs such means as stylisation or exaggeration freed of the actual object of representation to aid prompt recognition, and which can also be employed manipulatively - serves as a vital trigger for her visual inventions. So Neukamp confronts us with what are almost grotesque "picture puzzles" when she releases abstract, realistic and comic-like elements from the print media and allows them to collide with one another in an alogical sense within the restricted rectangles of her canvases; picture puzzles whose isolated details still conjure up memories of things seen, while simultaneously confounding our customary ways of looking and interpreting, precisely because they guide our gaze to meaningless, fragile or unresolved arrangements.

In several phases that only began in 2009, Anne Neukamp has not only painted, but also produced small-sized collages - gummed pictures in the true sense of the word. What is remarkable here is that her personal concept of the picture as a painter never developed on the basis of *papier collé*; rather the conception behind her paintings has constantly been geared to the mode of collage/décollage. As such she has always adhered to a method aimed at innovation, whose desideratum lies in the experimental and processual production of intertextuality by conflating fragments of reality from differing contexts. Unlike her work with the paper collage format, the processes of gluing materials over one another, in the physical sense, or of tearing them off (again) does not constitute an option for her when she works on her images on canvas. The latter are done step by step without advance planning, so that they come into being during the work process. The painted-over layers or evanesced elements are permanently incised into her paintings and remain present, even when they do not seem to be constantly visible.

With her clear decision for demonstratively multilayered works, for allusion and mystery, for a movement between the poles of abstraction and figuration as well as the joyous interleaving of divergent visual traditions, Anne Neukamp has opened up a glittering space for possibilities that prompts the most diverse interpretations. The (re)presentation of a message, such as the viewer is accustomed to seek in images, has always resided here in the *In-Between* and precisely there where it would not be expected - as for instance behind the curtain or in the reflection in the mirror.

The motif of the fold, which we encounter repeatedly in Anne Neukamp's pictures and most clearly in the painting *Saum* mentioned earlier, seems quite paradigmatic for the celebrated navigation her paintings perform between the levels. For the fold suggests a depth model. It points time and again to the surface and distinguishes inside from outside while simultaneously rendering their distinction impossible.

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