

REGEN PROJECTS

Canbaz, Melissa, "Rachel Harrison: kestnergesellschaft, Hanover," translated by Jane Yager, *frieze*, September 2013 [ill.].

frieze

Reviews

GERMANY

RACHEL HARRISON kestnergesellschaft, Hanover

Rachel Harrison's solo show at the kestnergesellschaft, 'fake titel', brought together some of her most intriguing recent work, including sculptures and drawings from her 2012 series 'The Help'. The latter are coloured pencil drawings of Amy Winehouse, who gazes at Picasso-esque dancers. Harrison is clearly fascinated by Winehouse's anti-hero persona and its media presence. In addition to the portraits of Winehouse, 'The Help' includes schematized motifs borrowing styles from Gustave Courbet and Willem de Kooning, and a portrait of Martin Kippenberger, whose admonishing finger attempts to warn her – in both cases, however, 'the help' clearly comes too late.

The sculpture *Valid Like Salad* (2012) also appears to deal with liminal experiences. A charcoal drawing of Al Pacino as Scarface (found at a flea market) chromatically complements the polystyrene and cement stele on which it hangs so precariously that the column threatens to tip over. The various grey tones are abruptly interrupted by a bright red dog collar suspended beneath the Pacino image. The laconically sculptural execution of *Valid Like Salad*, as with all of Harrison's pieces, is positioned between motion and stillness. In the installation *Hoarders* (2012), Harrison visualizes the dialogue from the work's central video through various sculptural elements. In the video, a taxi driver and his passenger, neither of whom are clearly visible, discuss

what they believe to be an imminent corporate dictatorship and the one percent who hoard their money at home the way other people pile up rubbish. It is the commonplace rant of an outraged citizen, whose voice the artist makes audible.

The container of protein powder that sits enthroned atop the nearly two-metre-high sculpture *Syntha-6* (2012) suggests at least that something might take form again. The undefined pedestal, with a protruding mass clinched beneath it that seems to act as a lever, poses questions about its function. In such pieces, forms are constantly dramatized, but the 3D sculptural work is conditioned by the 2D image. Harrison vehemently resists the transformation of base materials into aesthetic, symbolic or critical values for the sake of hermeneutical satisfaction. The exhibition title 'fake titel' could thus be an ironic reference to the tendency of titles to force interpretation and mystification.

Harrison's large-scale installations are especially rich in theatrical potential. In *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (2011), an opulent construction of boxes and platforms formed a sort of wall across the gallery. According to the artist, the setting is based on the travel writing of the amateur archaeologist John Lloyd Stephens, whose discoveries made a major contribution to our knowledge of ancient Mayan and Aztec civilizations. The wall, positioned diagonally in the exhibition space, was reminiscent of a ruin. A black ring-shaped object resting on the wall – inspired by a Mesoamerican ball game with a ritual function, a pre-Columbian precursor of football – further underscored the artist's anthropological leanings.

This exhibition reiterated how expansive Harrison's investigations are: she brings together allegories, connects art history with pop-cultural phenomena, and assembles the pasts that are the essence of her work. Further, she insists on making these processes visible through illogical systems of classification and unexpected arrangements of satirical objects. Perhaps this is why Winehouse fits into Harrison's repertoire so well – a woman whose self-sacrifice is, in a sense, already an iconic item.

MELISSA CANBAZ
TRANSLATED BY JANE YAGER



1
Julia Rometti and
Victor Costales, *The Curtain of
Magical Anarchy*, 2013,
huayrura seeds on rope,
2.9 x 2.5 m

2
'Larry Bell & Sarah Crowner,
Meet Marlow Moss, 2013,
installation view

3
Larry Bell
SF 3/9/12 (detail), 2012,
mixed media on black paper,
76 x 56 cm

4
Rachel Harrison
Valid Like Salad, 2012,
mixed media, 2.1 x 1.2 x 1.2 m