

Verschiebungersatz*Curated by David Rimanelli*

November 19, 2011 – January 27, 2012

If catastrophe and repressed passion operate in a space between the silence of disavowal and the trickery of disguise, they share with certain profound currents in contemporary art an abstraction of representation and an elision of mimetic didacticism. The German word “Verschiebungersatz” conveys this sense of displacement—a postponement in time, a dislocation in space—with respect to the formation of a substitute. (*Verschiebung* means displacement; *ersatz*, substitute.) Yoked together, the two sides of this term portray the often unstated value of works of art during times of instability by bringing expression to meanings and experiences that are not yet possible to state in more conventional language. As an exhibition, “Verschiebungersatz” brings together a group of artists whose work transvalues those elements of psychic life which are otherwise prohibited expression. These artists find ways to introduce the work of art into the realm of primary processes associated with the unconscious and to elide the bar of censorship.

The displacement of psychic energy is a salient characteristic of the primary process, which governs the system of the unconsciousness. As a virtually objective correlative to this idea of the free displacement of psychic energies, the intense physicality of Cecily Brown’s paintings can be seen as emblematic of the exhibition’s theme. In this world of fragmented vitality, built of interleaving brushstrokes, Brown reserves an interior space for extravagance in opposition to repressive force. Sergej Jensen’s, *Untitled (Bad Dreams)*, uses a similar density of layered figuration, only to reveal the dreamwork’s critical play in the substitution of a carpet fragment for the painter’s craft.

Wilhelm Sasnal, Thilo Heinzmann, and Eberhard Havekost all engage the inherent tensions between masking and revealing form as subject. Heinzman’s *Heinze* appropriates the naked form of the classic haystack armature as a standing sculpture, its spiked arms recalling the inherent dangers of support systems. Sasnal’s painting of strobe lights characteristically withholds in his search for a meaningful subject to paint. The surface of Havekost’s *Minus 2 Meter 2*, is *unheimlich* in its luxuriant depiction of a folded blanket that is also a veiled and masked surface.

In works by Charline von Heyl, Tom Burr, and Jacqueline Humphries, the specter of physicality is evoked through subtle reference to constraint, loss, and desire. Von Heyl, in the very title of her painting *Idolores*, achieves a *Verschiebung* that resounds throughout the formal dislocations of the object. Suggestions of confinement and loss echo through Burr’s triptych of pinned t-shirts. Though Burr’s tableau resists a fixed narrative, he flattens physical presence into an impossibly compressed absence. Situating a mysteriously vortical image within a vast silvered ground, Humphries creates a perversely suggestive icon: a sacred center radiant with anatomical, even scatological associations.

Heimo Zobernig, John Stezaker, and Joyce Pensato bring a submerged yet eloquent critique to abstract and gestural painting. Zobernig bedizens the canvas with Swarovski crystals and refuse, conjoining the icy idealism of Modernist progress with the residue of disposability. Stezaker’s diptych portrays two blank screens, reflecting the critical strategies of appropriation within an endlessly self-referential void. Pensato’s dripping and destroyed *Daisy* has abandoned Disney’s cartoon narratives for Edvard Munch’s expressionist dreamscape.