

Contemporary Art Daily

A Daily Journal of International Exhibitions

Week in Review: January 18, 2009

Welcome to Week in Review, our Sunday round-up of the last 7 days of activity here at Contemporary Art Daily. The Holidays are over and galleries are opening their first exhibitions of the year. Check in each day for exciting new exhibitions from around the world.

Editorial Comment:

Two of this week's featured artists are contemporary painters who share a similar approach. Both Richard Aldrich and Charline von Heyl produce diverse, challenging paintings, sometimes drawing from a sustained vocabulary and frequently arriving at anomalies. Both move fluidly between abstraction and, if not representation, reference. Each has a disposition toward flatness, although von Heyl's is a more layered plane. The two artists have a number of outward similarities, and by description are very much alike.

But part of what makes contemporary art compelling is the degree to which intangible, unnameable qualities drive our experience of it. In spite of their closeness, Aldrich and von Heyl offer extremely different feelings to viewers of their current exhibitions.

Aldrich's show for Bortolami in New York is guided by an air of off-handedness and a preoccupation with the formal. He is a tinkerer here, tweaking the conventions of painting and his own sensibility in order to arrive at new-feeling objects. We get the sense that Aldrich is thinking about art, about painting, about the visual, and he seems to be translating an attitude towards them into his work.

Von Heyl, using similar tactics, comes to very different conclusions. Her images are both intellectual and psychological, using the particulars that interest Aldrich in service of a variety of sensations. In some, she produces largely rhetorical paintings, whose sense of analysis implies a disinterested producer and asks for a disinterested viewer. Others barely contain violence.

Though her targets vary, Von Heyl points her paintings at the viewer, and they seek to

affect. Aldrich's work is passive; the vector instead goes from viewer to object. So says Aldrich in the press release accompanying his show:

"It's not about what this painting does

A wanderer comes across a pile of chipped porcelain pieces. Set to work with glue, they construct an elegant saucer. When the previous owner, before they no longer had a use for it, first found the pile of chipped porcelain pieces they had constructed a teacup, and the owner before them a figurine of Adonis. Thus is the nature of history: many pieces always being found and then reconstructed.

Artwork is an inverted tmesis, that is pieces broken from a whole. And meaning is created by the interpretation, that is the reconstruction, of this tmesis. The viewer is thus, in actuality, the creator. They have been given, by the artist, a language with which they begin to explain themselves. The artworks become connecting tissue for the thoughts and revelations of the viewer. The artworks become mirrors for the viewer to re-view themselves in (and this "re-viewing" is of importance as one is changing every day). We visit different stores everyday, always investigating ourselves in their mirrored glass walls."

Von Heyl is assertive, intellectual and often dark. Aldrich is usually interested in the daily, the plain, and the poetic. Both are among the leading practitioners of contemporary painting and demonstrate the vastness of possibility between even the most similar approaches.