

Dog and Cat

An Exhibition by Karina Spechter at Semjon Contemporary

4.11. – 22.12.2016

From attitude to sign to art

Karina Spechter's large-format painting showing a blue dog, the title of which was reduced to a simple *H.* 30 years ago, was one of her last panel paintings created during her time as a student under Georg Baselitz at the former School (now: University) of Fine Arts in Berlin.

On a flaming, orange-red ground a deep-blue painted dog head almost fills the foreground. The dog head rests on a bulky neck, is presented *en face* and appears to be fixing the viewer with its gaze. We cannot clearly decide whether an attentive watchdog or a beast is hidden behind it. Its massive appearance and size create an uncanny atmosphere and do not inspire much confidence. Nevertheless, the animal does not show its flashing teeth, its snout is closed – it could equally be velvety and smooth. The blue dog as a companion and devoted friend, protector of his master or mistress?

Despite the physical dimension of the object depicted, nothing in this creature seems "real": the blue fur, the proportions, the almost symmetrical ears, the dark areas representing the eyes with their serious expression, almost hypnotizing, the coarse shadow line separating the head from the neck, the indicated snout. Everything stays adumbrated in this open, "wild" style of painting in signal colours. The blue dog's head is a pure allegation, an artistic statement that the young artist has confidently postulated long ago.

The painting has accompanied her transition from painting to object and sculpture: since then her sculptural works, in their reduced form and special materiality, have kept their enormous presence in space, concentrating a large form when viewed from the distance and from close up unfolding a complexity of countless little units that have become the signet of the sculptor Karina Spechter.

Cat, Spechter's recent work, a pink animal head is also pure allegation, a sculptural statement contrasting the artist's former painting. Its voluminous form is quite idiosyncratic, made of crocheted PVC foil, which defines the pierced outer surface of the sculpture in space; heavy and massive in its effect and at the same time surprisingly light and transparent in material – airy metallic foil – and technique – "harmless" crochet work, however with huge crocheted stitches! Brightly coloured like candy paper, shiny like Christmas tree balls, and yet, instead of cheerful sweetness rather a sense of uneasiness is produced: the usual association with a

pussycat is crushed through the object's mere size. The impression of a face is created through interwoven threads of foil in diverse colour shades and various densities. Our counterpart seems to stare at us with hollow eyes.

The cat as a self-confident, individual and restrained creature, the dog as the submissive, devoted friend of human beings, pink and blue – the contrast could hardly be greater.

When contrasting *Dog* and *Cat*, painting *H.* from 1987 and the mighty crocheted cat from 2016, it becomes obvious where the beginnings of Spechter's visual language are rooted and why she has turned to sculpture. The dog's head in blue reduced to a sign appears remarkably flat, despite the painted or visually indicated details as snout, eyes and ears; through the reduced contours, it becomes voluminous, however not further differentiated, but all the more concentrated and powerful. It is exactly this presence that is characteristic for the artist's sculptural work.

Karina Spechter knows how to – condense the essence of the depicted into a sign, distilling a unique form out of it that cannot be overlooked and creating a physicality, the shape of which stays in the mind.

While painting came naturally to the artist, executed rapidly and impetuously, as can be traced from the dynamic brush style –her 'Sturm-und-Drang' period, so to speak – , her sculptural work is produced significantly slower in countless little steps: the confident, rapid but precise stroke is exchanged for an equally self-confident but persistent and time-consuming procedure. The result is similar in its effect: an irritating, unmissable sign, concentrated in its distinctive, three-dimensional shape, crocheted from materials atypical for classical sculpture, appearing unfamiliar, as if picked from other contextual areas. The expressive brush style has been exchanged for a controlled but wild arrangement of sub-forms, the so-called *Stipsel* out of paper and glue, populating the sculptures in irritating numbers, showing the artist's signature in their idiosyncratic presence and almost disturbing effect.

These particles can also be perceived as visual surface treatment transformed into space, just as the three-dimensional meshes in their diverse colour shades appear as if crocheted with a brush. In an original but complex manner Karina Spechter has not only transformed the colour but also her painting style into a sculptural work, and for this purpose she has invented her own painterly means of expression.

Her work keeps surprising, the new creations just as her older works in retrospect!

The artist has cultivated her spontaneity and the concentrated strength of her swift stroke also in her drawings. There, she keeps stroking in cascade-like moves, carefully approaching the shapes, at the same time intensifying these, whether in

drawing or with a few lines of writing or words here and there, thus approaching the essence, often also referred to in the title.

Why has the artist ceased painting ca. 30 years ago, giving it up for sculpture? A major reason seems to me that in the object, in the designed form a special stage is provided for her concern to create a concentrated, isolated and unforgettable sign. We three-dimensional creatures experience the sculpture as more "real" than a (panel) painting, it is superior through its presence in space. Already the fact that the recipient must take a position to the object, the sculpture, as a physical counterpart occupies the space it is placed in and forces us into an intensified confrontation with the object. A painting on the wall does not get in our way. Through the imperative nature of the physically experienced confrontation with a sculptural work the viewer faces himself/herself. The artist is given the opportunity to appear dominant and subversive at the same time and to inscribe the sign shaped by her with its unique visual language as a work of art into the memory of the observer.

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Semjon H. N. Semjon
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