



PSM
Köpenicker Str. 126
10179 Berlin
p: +49 30 75524626
f: +49 30 75524625
office@psm-gallery.com
www.psm-gallery.com

THOMAS CHAPMAN GLISTEN

07. Juni - 20. Juli 2013

The colors of Thomas Chapman's most recent works in 2013 show a resemblance to the colors dominating the surroundings of his studio. Shades of washed-out, crumbling GDR concrete, the faded graffiti, the neon colored signs of the shops that popped up after the reunification and went out of business again. At first glance simply grey, his work does take on the whole palette. Composed of shard-like fragments, each designed and painted individually in carefully selected colors, with distinctively created patterns, that pick up a variety of visual references, from sketches to handwritten poems (that can also turn into text paintings) and graphic variations on most recent camouflage patterns composed of pixelated forms. The final piece is a composition that nearly succeeds at presenting one whole form, but still feels like an assemblage. Or something that broke, and was put back together again, nearly successful at representing itself, yet maintaining a sense of awkwardness, an element of handicraft remote from any idea of industrial perfection.

These pieces remind me of a pile of ice in a famous painting, the prized possession of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Caspar David Friedrich's *Sea of Ice (or Wreck of Hope)* from 1824. Friedrich serves up this jarring pile-up of slabs of ice with a side order of a comparatively diminutive shipwreck on the right, as a heavy-handed allegory of the universal frailty of all human doings, crushed by a cruel and overwhelming nature, and an inevitable yet indifferent fate.

As cool or romantic as Chapman's work may (or may not) be, it offers a more subjective, local and contemporary experience. The allegoric qualities of these works are quite complex. There are traces of autobiographic potential, gaps, not quite filled with Perspex elements. Spots in time, where you stop trusting your memory. Where what was said, not even mentioned or just thought of has become a bit of a blur. Scraps of paper of ambiguous sources, fabric from seventies furniture.

Especially the latter appears to offer the consolation of the real. The same goes for the sound absorbers that could pass for interior elements in a professional sound studio, designed to absorb sound waves and thereby suppress unwanted echoes. As much as Chapman's sound absorbers limit acoustic feedback, they do however produce striking visual echoes. The monochrome pieces conjure up the coolness of minimal art, although the grey fabric covering them was a leftover found at an art fair, reflecting common aesthetics of art presentation within the work itself. Another sound absorber covered in found upholstery material with floral motifs combines the sexualized aura of commercial music industry productions with a grandmotherly sense of gentleness and petty bourgeois comfort and warmth.

The warmth of a nest, a cocoon maybe. What happens there? It's not for everyone to see. It's exclusive and elusive, a moment of animal theatricality that makes it interesting. The covert creation of something that isn't there yet. The very concept of going back into a pupal stage, becoming a larva, holing up in a tight little container and producing yourself anew. A bit like an artist's studio: a safe place where the artist can grow new wings – and emerge from. *Sound Absorber Suite*, the centerpiece of the show, takes up this motif of transformation. It is a crossbreed of a functional sound studio and an accessible sculpture. As if Thomas Chapman had opened up one of his pieces in an attempt at artistic open heart surgery. Producing this record, *Glisten*, largely inside the sculpture places it in an extended family relationship, like a distant cousin, to Robert Morris' *The Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961). Albeit not as hermetic, with a different magic trick, with an entrance suggesting transparency, it generously grants the viewer access to its very core.

This core is a rather strange cell, somewhat cuddly, standing on stilts, removed from the grounds of reality. Possibly a poor, lo-fi descendent of the insectoid capsules that landed astronauts on the moon, when space travel still had an air of symbolic heroism in the cold-war era? Maybe more of a bohemianist bubble informed by a speculative realism that merges immediate surroundings with science fiction, attempts philosophic bricolage with unorthodox materials, unaffected by academic protocol. Demarcating a plane of consistency and reckless integrity, lacking any cynicism or dampening caution, this hybrid construction produces forms that are both, abstract and vivid, dramatizing and epic, reflecting the enlivening and libidinizing idea that making art is all that really matters.

It illuminates an idea of expansion in a chaotic system, triggering events that are infinitely sensitive. Like feeling things magnetically, like osmosis, like weirdly setting itself into place in endless formations of weird shapes around strange attractors. Shapes that can be recorded, grabbed and captured, but as such remain unpredictable. No way to know where they go. Only traces. Like snail trails. Glistening.

- Andreas Schlaegel