

ALIENATE TRANSCEND**Caro Niederer, Milva Stutz, Zoë Claire Miller**

02 December, 2023 – 20 January, 2024

Barbara Seiler Galerie is proud to inaugurate their new gallery space at Rämistrasse 18 in Zurich with a group exhibition titled *Alienate Transcend*, which brings together the works of Zoë Claire Miller, Caro Niederer and Milva Stutz. The three artists share a common interest in physicality, interpersonal relationships and isolation, as well as the contemporary interpretation of art-historical and cultural-historical symbols. *Alienate Transcend* examines the complex relationship between alienation and transcendence where the concept of alienation refers to the sense of detachment, disconnection, or otherness one may experience in an increasingly fragmented society. Transcendence, on the other hand, represents the ability to rise above these limitations and find new forms of being or connectedness.

A collective creative process, production methods that connect with nature and the examination of body politics are central aspects of **Zoë Claire Miller's** artistic work. Her sculptural work is inspired by current events as well as ancient myths and cult objects, which she reinterprets and expands with humorous and (queer-) feminist readings: the series of 'Tintinnabuli' (2022), for example, deal with wind chimes of the same name, which served as door amulets or protective charms in ancient Pompeii and were trimmed with small bells on chains. These chimes were often characterized by phallic motifs that venerated the penis as a sign of fertility and creative power. Incorporating animal-like elements or shapes inspired by sex toys, Miller creates cheerful figurines made of glazed ceramic that hover in space. In doing so, she reinterprets the phallic symbol and removes it from its association with male dominance and ruling authority - the objects now stand for a playful and pleasurable approach to sexuality. In 'Reproductive Justice (In Lavender)' (2020), the scales of justice are reinterpreted in a political way: Carried by a uterus and two ovaries, the scale becomes a symbol of reproductive self-determination, the right to abortion and current debates surrounding gender and identity.

In 2022 Miller started a new series of ceramics based on research in relics and archeological artifacts from the area of Naples in Italy. With 'Diavolo die Mergellina' she refers to a painting by Leonardo da Pistoia, a depiction of the slaying of the dragon by the archangel Michael, in which the dragon is shown with features of a female human being. According to a legend these were the features of Italian poet Vittoria Colonna, who despised the clerical patron of the painting. With her sculpture Miller creates a tender tribute to an indomitable and self-determined female figure of the Renaissance.

Caro Niederer captures everyday situations from her own life and translates them into paintings of multilayered, vibrant colors. Often she reinterprets classic pictorial genres such as the floral still life, the landscape or the self-portrait: 'Cross Country' (2009/2022) shows a single woman thickly wrapped in winter gear on cross-country skis in an Engadin mountain landscape covered deeply in snow. The bright pink sky contrasts with the cooler colors of the snow and lends to a dreamy winter landscape. One can almost feel the blistering cold and the clear air of this Alpine evening scene, which is indicated by the glistening of the ice on the cross-country skiing trail and the deep red evening sky typical for the Engadin. An entire new series is dedicated to interior and exterior exhibition spaces. In 'Léonor Fini Garden' (2023), a female figure is seen reclining on a bench in a park in the middle of Paris, seemingly noticing the viewer's presence, while pigeons, though just vaguely hinted with dashes of soft colors, bring the dreamlike atmosphere of the park to life. On a wall in the back of the park we see reproductions of paintings by the surrealist painter Léonor Fini, whose abstract forms are reflected in the blue square in front of the woman, the same form that is repeated throughout the series of exhibition paintings. In 'Fondation Beyeler' we find a pink square hovering above the two squares alluding to paintings by Goya, which could be a reflection of the sun similar to the bright ray of sunlight on the floor in 'Fondation Cartier', where the form of the square is taken up in a large painting showing one of Damien Hirst's cherry blossom paintings. The museum guard, again a woman seating, is wearing a mask, a reference to the time in which Niederer spent several months on Paris during a residency program during the time of the pandemic.

The starting point of Niederer's work is always photographs from her personal photo archive, often shot quickly and coincidentally of situations from her private life and immediate environment, similar to a diary or an Instagram account. They are insights into the artist's everyday life and show places she has been to and people who surround her. Often these are taken in museums and parks and capture the seemingly incidental and casual. Niederer almost always translates the photograph first on canvas whereby taking the liberty to freely interpret the photograph, omit things, add things or choose a new perspective, and from there into other media which can range from ceramics to tapestry, glass and fabrics or even an entire interior such as the museum cafe at Kunstmuseum St.Gallen. Niederer paints exclusively with oil paint which she applies in a very liquid form. After each layer of paint she lets the paint dry completely and only then adds a new layer of paint, resulting in the color pigments resting on top of each other rather than being amalgamated, which adds to the intensive luminescence of her works.

The newly created series of works showing the museum rooms of well-known institutions in Riehen, Zurich and Paris was selected specifically for the gallery space. These are color spaces that are characterized by their generous architecture; the works of art depicted are reflected in floor surfaces or overlaid with ornamental drawings of the captured light. People are depicted in pairs or groups or are shown absorbed in a book in the position of an exhibition supervisor. The series captures moments, opening up biographical references to Caro Niederer's life and everyday experiences during the pandemic. Shown again in an exhibition space, the spaces inside and outside the painting are interwoven.

In her video, **Milva Stutz** reflects on social perception of love and relationships in a time characterized by technology and digitalization: 'Delay' (2023) is about the farewell of a couple at the train station which is delayed due to a technical defect. The moment of waiting creates an irritation in the supposedly predictable script of a romantic farewell scene; the failure of the technology confronts the two lovers with their own feelings and forces them to reflect on their ideas of love, devotion and independence: these are told through inner dialogues reminiscent of text messages, in hummed pop songs and scenes in which an insect is carefully dissected or the couple seems to rehearse intimate scenes, but repeatedly fails in an attempt to melt intimately.

In the combination of real film, hand-modeled body extensions and CGI animation, the artist creates a model-like setting in which virtual smoothness contrasts with (inter)human physicality. The limbs of the protagonists are too large and awkward, the furniture appears surreally distorted and seems to have its own dynamic materiality, while the deserted train station remains a mere simulation. Time seems to stand still for a moment. The two protagonists remain trapped in their contradictory feelings and memories and lose themselves in a loop of thoughts between staying and leaving.

Text: Eva-Maria Knüsel

Credits 'Delayed'

Written, directed, produced and edited by Milva Stutz / Cast Emmeliin Chemouny and Maximilian Reichert / Camera Joanna Piechotta / 3D environment & animation Quaint – Alessandro Holler & Sandro Lochau / Sound Design Zentralton/Roland Widmer / SFX Miria Germano, Milva Stutz / Mask Miria Germano / Costum Sabina Nussbaumer / Assistant director Doretina Imeri / Gaffer Daniel Bleuer / Lighting Technician Carmen Gasser / Catering Remy Blaser, Popa Maggi, Christian Sprecher / Translation Sophie Jung / Voice Lina Martha Benedict / Voice Philipp Emory Rüegg / Dramaturgical advice Bernadette Kolonko / Editing advice Antshi von Moos, Andri Erdin / Postproduction Unsere Farben/ Compositing Brigae Haelg / Color Grading Jürgen Kupka / VFX Manuela Pfister / Postproducer Ueli Müller / Production advice Saskia von Virág

Thanks

Nina Bandi, Remy Blaser, Blow Up Studio, Sarah Calörtscher, Vanessa Heer, Eva-Maria Knüsel, Popa Maggi, Olivia Stutz, Antshi von Moos, Mirjam Woodtli

Special thanks

Bernadette Kolonko, Christian Sprecher

Supported by

Fachstelle Kultur Kanton Zürich, Stadt Zürich Kultur, Bundesamt für Kultur Succès cinéma, Cassinelli-Vogel-Stiftung, Ernst Göhner Stiftung