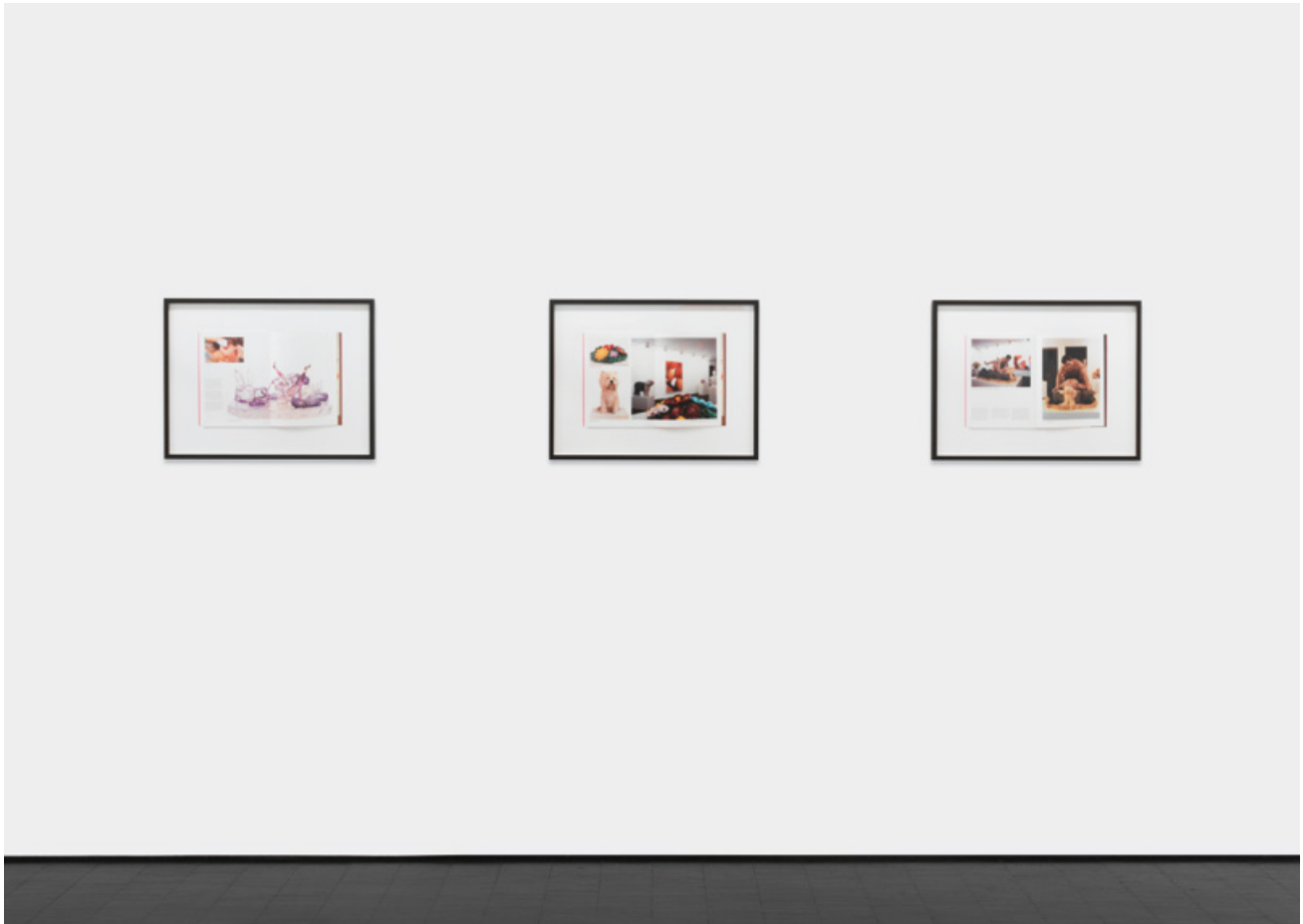


TEXTE ZUR KUNST

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A photograph of a young man with dark hair, wearing a white tank top with the word 'SUMMER' printed on it, sitting on a windowsill. He is looking out a large window at a cityscape under a cloudy sky. The window has a grid pattern. In the foreground, there are some potted plants on the windowsill.

The Sea



Maria Eichhorn, "Prohibited Imports (Jeff Koons)," 2003/2005

BATHETIC FALLACY

Alexandra Symons Sutcliffe on “A Fatal Attraction” at Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

Bathos is a literary term that describes an unfortunate lapse in tone, a text’s descent from the exquisite to the trivial. First developed by Alexander Pope as a means to define the comedic effects of a lack of artful authenticity in prose and poetry, bathos is often characterized by an abruptness in the transition from a high-minded topic to something more vulgar. Like its related concept, pathos, bathos has an affective quality of decline, charting the experience of sinking into the quotidian, away from authentic experience and critical vision. Bathos is a descriptive term, which, in giving a sensorial texture to written arguments, names the indiscrete or unspecific response one has to knowing something is not quite sincere.

The association of the title of Galerie Barbara Weiss’s recent group exhibition, “A Fatal Attraction,” with the 1987 Glenn Close and Michael Douglas thriller *Fatal Attraction*, is a bathetic one. As is the press release’s focus on the outdoor clothing brand Patagonia’s 2011 Black Friday sale advert, in which an image of one of the company’s most popular items is shown under the slogan “Don’t Buy This Jacket.” A reproduction of this poster served as the press image for “A Fatal Attraction,” in place of a representative artwork from the show. “Shopping seems to merge into everything, everything seems to merge into shopping. Even its critique.” This according to the exhibition text, which, following an entropic logic, continues, “the line between opposition and opportunism has become all but blurred.”

“A Fatal Attraction” includes work by Eva Barto, Sara Deraedt, Maria Eichhorn, Richard Frater, Jonathan Horowitz, Samuel Jeffery, Yuki Kimura, and Karin Schneider. The title is actually taken from a 1982 exhibition by Thomas Lawson at the Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago,

which focused on the Pictures generation artists. The relationship between the Barbara Weiss and Lawson exhibitions is evident and dramatized in the current show. In 1982, Lawson included work by Dara Birnbaum, Cindy Sherman, Matt Mullican, and Jeff Koons, as well as other artists who engaged media as tools to analyze normative and naturalized representations of life under late capitalism. In the Barbara Weiss exhibition, Eichhorn appropriates Koons in *Prohibited Imports* (Jeff Koons) (2003/2015), in which she offers her own second-order critique by simply presenting his practice as is.

With the inclusion of Eichhorn’s work, history and reference appear as small recursive loops, nodes within and between artworks and contexts. The gallery itself is repeatedly addressed in the exhibition; by Eva Barto, for example, in her postcard *The Philanthropist (version 2, Gallery Barbara Weiss 25/01/19)* (2018), as well as in Karin Schneider’s *Holiday Card* (2018) PowerPoint projection, in which the artist discusses her practice in relation to the late Barbara Weiss and current gallery staff. These comedic forms of intertextuality rely on those in the know; in-jokes that appeal to specific groups. The inclusion of one photo from Sara Deraedt’s *Hoover* series of photographs is purposefully oblique; removed from the rest of its series, it is just a snapshot of a hoover, though vacuum plays well within the given context.

The rhetorical tropes of both text and image, so vital for the Pictures artists, are not carried over into this exhibition, but works such as Jonathan Horowitz’s *Je t’aime* (1990) do engage in a form of semantic play between literalism and legibility. *Je t’aime* is a ten-minute looped film of a cigarette burning down and out, set to the overdubbed soundtrack of Serge Gainsbourg’s song of

the same name. Simultaneously an art-historical joke, deploying a reference to René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (*This is not a pipe*) (1928–29) and a kitschy comment on disposable and consumable pleasures, Horowitz's film plays with the relationship between the material finitude of the cigarette and the capacity of video to exploit and distort the passage of time. The video is also a comment on commercial and consumable pleasures. The popular love song is the most digestible form of commercial sentimentality, and in Horowitz's video Gainsbourg is looped to repeat himself seemingly endlessly: everything merges into shopping.

In addition to the symbol of the Patagonia jacket found in the press materials, there is also an actual jacket in the exhibition: submerged inside Richard Frater's *Stop Shell* (*ghost fishing version*) (2018) is a coat made of recyclable materials. Frater's clear plastic cube, filled with water and the jacket, clearly echoes Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cubes* (1963–2008), and it belongs to Frater's wider research around object-based inquiry into the crisis of ecological destruction and climate disaster. In art and culture, often analytic critique seems to rely on the need for transparency. The critical procedure is as follows: make visible the object of critique by isolating it from a general condition, and then act on it so as to transform the object. For Frater, the assumption that transparency produces legibility is problematized; the slow violence of climate change ultimately proves resistant to normative systems of representation. *Stop Shell* (*ghost fishing version*) is accompanied in the center of the gallery by two other sculptural works: Samuel Jeffery's containers *Untitled* (2017 and 2019). The untitled objects belong to a series of lacquered acrylic vessels. Empty and mutable,

Jeffery's sculptures, like Frater's work, borrow from formal strategies of Minimalism and Conceptualism. Though laboriously handmade, the containers appear generic and industrial; to gain access to their fabrication history, the viewer has to refer to the extensive materials list, and yet still gaps remain. Positioned in the middle of the gallery, they contain a kind of pregnant performativity, soaking up the context of the exhibition while undermining its legibility through their opacity. The reticence of Jeffery's work is a foil to the festering complication of Frater's live system of natural and synthetic materials.

Sincerity and insincerity exist on a continuum, a thread that runs throughout "A Fatal Attraction." The curatorial style of the exhibition approaches a kind of artistic intervention; the objects communicate with one another but then refuse total legibility. While it may seem antiquated to talk in terms of "reading" an exhibition or artwork, here it is precisely a dynamic readership that is privileged over mere spectatorship. As the press text boasts, there is a "quietness" to the works on display, decidedly "less heroic" than their precedents. According to Lawson, "we are trapped firmly within the terms of a fatal attraction [...] Unable to say 'no' with any conviction." The show reveals our compulsion to seek pleasure in the mechanisms of mimetic over-identification, with the very condition we seek to critique. We may not be buying it, but we can try selling it anyway.

"A Fatal Attraction," Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, January 26–March 30, 2019.



Richard Frater, "Stop Shell (ghost fishing version)," 2018