

Galerie Barbara Wien

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Kristian Vistrup Madsen, *Georges Adéagbo at Barbara Wien*, Artforum, Vol. 59, No. 1, September 2020, p. 189

The interest was in the gesture and in the trace. Referential meaning and even intentionality are dispensable. So is classical compositional organization. What counts is weightlessness, suspense. As Bowie phrased it, channeling his Major Tom: “I’m floating in a most peculiar way!”

With a certain mysterious detachment, Haller tries to prevent us from figuring out her creative logic. “Knights” needed no *Texte zur Kunst*. A xeroxed leaflet sufficed. It consisted of eight repetitions of the phrase “I’m trying to write a sentence with a mouse,” borrowed from a text by artist Christoph Bruckner. Art and language were here reduced to a scrawl, contesting the authority and professorial presumption of experts. And yet Haller does not hesitate to insert allusions to canonical works of art into her work: The black square inevitably evokes Malevich. But these are not quotations, as the gallery’s Christian Meyer assured me, nor statements, but rather symptoms. And, as they say, thou shalt love thy symptoms as thyself.

—Brigitte Huck

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

BERLIN

Georges Adéagbo

BARBARA WIEN

Georges Adéagbo is a one-trick artist. But the outcome of that trick is endlessly variable. His method consists of making assemblages of objects: mostly books, magazines, newspaper articles, record covers, and wooden sculptures, but also the occasional pair of underwear. These items are pinned to the wall, as in a teenager’s bedroom, with what looks like a contrived messiness: Everything’s askew, with no apparent relation between one thing and another. So open does Adéagbo’s structure appear that for a second you might think you can just pick anything up, perhaps even take it home. But then it is art, after all, and so you start to look for distance, permanence, design.

The exhibition’s title, “*L’Abécédaire de Georges Adéagbo: la civilisation parlant et faisant voir la culture* . . . !” (“The Alphabet of Georges Adéagbo: the civilization is talking and making culture visible” . . . !), was a reference to *L’abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Claire Parnet’s landmark 1989 series of television interviews with the French philosopher. Over nearly six hours, Deleuze worked his way through the alphabet, offering his two cents on *A* for *animal* and *B* for *boisson* and so forth. In *C* for *culture*, he explains his hatred of the subject, saying he engages with it only in the hope of encountering an idea that allows him to get out of it again. Escaping art through art also seems to be the point of Adéagbo’s trick. Every object gestures to an exit, an unexpected connection to other things, elsewhere.

Each iteration of Adéagbo’s art speaks to the times and the places that framed its production. In this case, the places were Germany, Japan, South Korea, and the artist’s native Benin. The time is the present, evidenced in a magazine cover of Harry and Meghan and in renderings of the spiky Covid ball. Other elements seemed less temporally specific. A story about Jennifer Aniston “finally happy again,” for instance, could have been from any point during the past fifteen years. One wondered about what lies behind all this hoarding. Does Adéagbo share my preoccupation with the outfits of the French first lady or with queer-interest films such *Carol* (2015) and *The Danish Girl* (2015), or was the occurrence of these references a matter of chance, meaning that I forged these paths through his alphabet myself? Could these assemblages accommodate any and every narrative, or was there some hidden design?

Both were the case, it seemed. Taking a few steps back, you realized there was symmetry to the scatter. Each wall had the outline of an altar,



View of “Georges Adéagbo,” 2020.

with the knickknacks unfolding from the center. The floor-based groups, often organized on and around a rug, likewise invited a devotional attitude. These vaguely religious formats pointed to Adéagbo’s construction as a cosmology, a self-conscious world-building exercise, the result of which was something very close to an immediate imprint of life itself in all its confusing, multifarious mundanity.

At the center of this cosmos was a thesis on how stuff comes together to testify to the geographical and historical situatedness of subjectivity, as well as to its transience. But this subjectivity was, as it turned out, not that of anyone in particular. Rather, as you wandered through the nine installations making up the exhibition looking for Adéagbo and the meaning you assumed he’d planted there, what you found was some warped and elusive reflection of yourself. Likewise, locations and temporalities melted and fused into something both shared and deeply intimate. Deleuze sought to escape culture through what he called encounters, and, as he told Parnet, “one has encounters with things and not with people.” Judging by Adéagbo’s alphabet, Deleuze was right.

—Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Sophie Reinhold

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

The title of one of Sophie Reinhold’s paintings here, *Gewöhne dich nicht daran*, 2019—referencing an anti-drug addiction slogan of the German Democratic Republic and translating as “Don’t get used to it”—might also apply to her purposely elliptical practice. The Berlin-based artist frequently works up pale paintings on a ground of jute and marble dust, with pieces of canvas cut out and stitched onto their surfaces to create ghostly figurations, like shallow reliefs on a facade. In this show, “*Das kann das Leben kosten*” (That Could Cost You Your Life), the chimerical expanse of the opening painting, *Courtroom*, 2020, was fashioned that way, with a small spectral face—judge? defendant?—floating within it. The canvas beside it, *R U concerned?* (*Eiermann*), 2020, was much brighter and tighter. A melancholy Humpty Dumpty or, as the subtitle would have it, egg man—maybe referencing the twentieth-century German architect Egon Eiermann—