Kunst & Denker Contemporary

LOUISA CLEMENT

**one step ahead moving backwards**

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**PRIMATE OF COLOR AND SHAPE**

About the series *Heads* by Louisa Clement

What is the most popular camera in the world? It’s not a Leica nor a Canon, Nikon nor Olympus, but it is the iPhone 6 - at least that is what Apple is claiming on its website World Gallery where you can find photos by iphone users along with tips and tricks for better photography. For example, Gabby K. added a picture of a person on a stone, which protrudes from a lake somewhere in the federal state of Washington. The special effect of the image is explained as follows: "Soft Light coupled with focus on reflections gives photos often a dreamy, ethereal quality. On this particular picture the composition makes it seem almost as if the person is floating. "A surreal cactus landscape immersed in the evening light of Phoenix achieves its appeal, so we read, by a restricted palette of reds and oranges. A black and white picture of raindrops sent in by Paul O. could “originate from the 1950s school of subjective photography. " “Even an everyday motif, like drops of water on a hood, can be captured from a unique perspective and look fascinating," The website does not seem to be focused on historic reference but rather on photographic effects, which is not surprising, after all, it's also about the marketing of apps and accessories.

Although Louisa Clement uses an iPhone for her photos, this much is clear: her images hardly count to the favorites of the World Gallery’s editorial board. Between the dramatic natural spectacles, breathtaking dynamic city scenes and exotic animal photographs, her works would be lonely foreign bodies among them - this is not because the artist is using the outdated iphone5 but rather, because her paintings are deliberately missing everything spectacular and sensational, dreamy and fascinating, because Clement concentrates entirely on the outlying everyday things.

The 25-part series *on one's way* (2012-2013), for example, has been created during different train trips. The pictures show details of seats, windows, doorsteps of compartments or the pattern of the floor – details you only notice through boredom on a long journey. The objects in the photos are easy to identify but Clement works with perspectives and post-production so that moments of reality become geometrically abstract compositions. The use of delicate pastel shades also shows the artist’s sensitivity to colors, as Clement comes from the art of painting and later found her love for photography.

Her new project *Heads* also uses the iPhone5. The 50- part series gathers 50 heads of mannequins that Clement has photographed in passing on the shelves of fashion stores in several European cities. She then printed the pictures in original size, framed them with almost no free space around the subject and hanged them like a frieze. It is not immediately clear to the viewer that the heads belong to mannequins: facial features, nor noses, mouths and eyes can be discerned in the series, just as haircuts, fashionable hats or towels. Instead, one can observe long oval forms, close in shape but still different from one another: black and white objects with strong shadows on the one hand, and complicated mirror reflections and a tangle of mysterious points of light on the other. Some images are almost two-colored - orange and blue or red and black, with other complex curves of blue, red and brown tones. From time to time lines of seams or joints are visible, dividing the forms even more. Some are more tapered and pointy than others. The surfaces vary depending on the material of the dolls, from quite smooth, to slightly uneven, to rough. Cracks and scratches add a number of additional nuances. Since modernism, mannequins fascinated photographers such as Umbo, Karl Schenker and Werner Rohde as well as artists of surrealism and new objectivity. Mostly they were concerned with the vitalization of dead mass products, the fetishization of objects true and false desire, the blurring of the boundaries between ideal and natural beauty.

In comparison, the photos by Clement mannequins do not exhibit these aspects of the uncanny and disturbing: In order to be as versatile as possible in the global markets, today's mannequins cannot be assigned to a specific image of women anymore. As can be seen in the succession of *Heads*, the heads of the figures are sexless and so stylized that they are generally neutral ciphers for the human head.

The former power of seduction of female art turns to the be at times cool, exuberant aesthetics of pictorial abstraction. But the emphasis on pure artistic beauty proves to be tricky. For indeed it is possible that the abolition of human traits seen as evil bitter comment on the absolutizing of the economy in politics and business.

The image of man is vanishing from Clement’s photos exactly as it is also disappearing from the bare figures on balance sheets of a sales and profit oriented social order.

In an interview, Florian Ebner, Head of the Photographic Collection of the Folkwang Museum in Essen and this year's curator of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, recently summarized the main themes of photography in recent decades.

While in the 1980s the discussion about the panel painting dominated the photographic discourse, today it is about the circulation of the images or photos themselves.

Against this background, the series *Heads* and also *on one's way* could be understood as a confrontation with art, in this case not with the strategies of history paintings - narration and overpowering - to which Clement’s teacher Andreas Gursky takes, but with the still life.

The coloristic contrasts and shape in her work accents this. Although the use of today's digital techniques as defined by Ebner, could be understood as a confrontation with the ubiquity of the photographic. Moreover, Clement can be associated with a further photographic tradition that Ebner has not mentioned in the conversation, namely the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s that began the inclusion of photography in the history of art. That Louisa Clement appeals to the conceptual art, is especially clear regarding her work in completed series.

For the artists who discovered photography at the beginning of the 1960s had untapped opportunities in the medium or, as Jan Dibbets said in retrospect: "In those days photography was regarded as a completely useless medium, and if it was used, then only for the documentation of things. " While Dibbets was interested in the perspective characteristics of the photograph, a decade later, Hans-Peter Feldmann was working on the discrepancy of what we know from an image and what we see in it, e.g. when he photographed car radios, while good music was playing. Feldmanns casualness corresponds with Clements approach in which it is not about the outstanding frame, but the complex potential of form and color, which is hidden behind the supposedly laconic excerpts of our reality.

Sven Beckstette