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Portentous Chainsaw Massacre

Claudia Comte at Kunstmuseum Lucerne

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In her first major institutional show in Switzerland Claudia Comte delivers all the dull mid-range design we've come to expect, but here there's a lot more and, now, with the incredulous air of credibility. Titled *10 Rooms, 40 Walls, 1059 m2*, and featuring over 60 paintings, 40 sculptures, 40 wall paintings and some prints, it's an epic ode to the big, dumb and aggressively anti-intellectual.





Claudia Comte, *Sculpture Object 41: Loony Toons, 2016*, Ebenholz, *Nussbaum und Curtains Lines (black and white pattern)*, 2017, courtesy of the artist and Privatsammlung Schweiz

This sprawling affair, so celebrated in its chosen title, continues the artist's investigations of valuable natural materials, geometric compositions and a peripheral subjective definition of humor. Riffs on Op Art form the majority of her painting practice. Think of it as bad art about bad art. But, as conceptually empty as their predecessors, they can achieve appealing visual effects. Usually, though, they undercut themselves with a lack of conceptual consideration.

Take the first wall one sees when entering the show. It's filled, save for a perfect absence of white around the edges, with a tight grid of black dots painted on the wall. At the center is what appears to be a large square canvas hung as a diamond. The dots are arranged to form exact intersections at the painting's corners, all stopping uniformly around the edges. The center of the square, which reveals itself to be four inverted quarters of a circle, is empty. The painting itself is of the basic variety, with bright colors and radiant lines creating the illusion of iridescence, but the play between the void at the center and the wall graphic creates a strong floating sensation that reverberates in front of the eye. It is by far the strongest work in the show, except that for some baffling reason it is actually two: the wall painting, *Dots (* 2017), and the painting, *Quarter Circle Painting CMYK* (2017). This happens again in other rooms with *White Roller Stripes on Black* (2017) and *Quarter Circle Painting RGB* (2017) and, to a lesser extent, with *The Three Elevators* (2017) and *Indigo Blush (Cocktail Paintings)* (2017). Why the artist would separate these conceptually is beyond comprehension. One would never work without the other. Reflecting a trivial approach, this purposeful rejection of artistic reflection, infects the entire show.



10 Rooms, 40 Walls, 1059 m2, Ausstellungsansicht Kunstmuseum Luzern, Foto: Gunnar Meier

It becomes uncomfortable when Comte gets into her funny work. Previously, this self-stated humor has resulted in things such as upright logs spelling out «HA HA HA», *HAHAHA* (2014).[1] Hilarious. Here it manifests as comic-like wall paintings such as *ZZIP* (2017), ?! (2017) and *Boing Boing* (2017). These look as the titles sound. One room is filled with a series of seven large oak sculptures, *Wooden Cactus* (2016), vaguely resembling those of Barbara Hepworth or Jean Arp reimagined as simplified cacti. Imagine a cactus from the Roadrunner cartoons in three dimensions and made of wood. Funny. Another room is centered around *Squeezed Tube 1–9* (2014), similar wooden forms generally resembling used tubes of paint or toothpaste. These objects have nothing to offer, other than a one-line play on the exotic executed in the normal, and they fail to hold up as even interior decoration. Which is to say that, while I am certain that this stuff doesn't belong in a museum, I'm not sure it even belongs in a design store. Why does the art world remain a place where you can execute another profession poorly and call it creative? Lingering feelings for Neo-Geo are moribund here. To celebrate these sculptures for their chainsawed execution, as Adam Jasper did in the

March 2016 issue of Artforum, is regressive and conservative in 2017 and the fetishization of



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The front room is home to three large hanging swings, *Giant Swing 1–3* (2017), made from lumpy pieces of wood. The good news is that they're comfortable. Otherwise they have few attributes save for the climbing rope detailing that connects the seat to the ceiling. Two rooms filled floor to ceiling with the series *Aeronautic Objects* (2016), sculptural and wall-hung groupings of said white plastic products, look as if she had raided Yngve Holen's closet and studio. How funny to reduce a considered career down to some stuff. Similarly off-putting is a room filled with *Marble Donut 1–8* (2017). Each of the eight objects, in white veined black marble, reminds one immediately of the digitally rendered film still compositions Emanuel Rossetti began in 2009. It is as if Comte yanked these images into her simple world. What reason, other than retrofetish anti-technological thinking, is there to recreate these digital works in the material they draw from? Depending on market vs. institutional definitions, Comte is one of the most successful artists of her generation. That she waits until her first major local museum showing to harness a peer whose career is built on the kind of curatorial support that hers is not is offensive.



10 Rooms, 40 Walls, 1059 m2, Ausstellungsansicht Kunstmuseum Luzern Foto: Gunnar Meier

But, this is an artist who has shown time and time again that not only does she not care to think about anything in-depth, she reviles those who do. Her work, through its refusal and rejection of cultural developmental thought, shouts out loud and clear that thinking isn't fun and it's not for everyone. All of the work on display here is aggressive to ideas, attacking or diminishing important critical thinking from the historical to the present. Not one ounce of self-reflection is shown. That a museum rewards and celebrates this is not surprising, it's outrageous. Here, yet again, we have a loud, anti-intellectual, seemingly populist individual who mocks everything to get ahead. Resist.

[1] «I think I'm trying to imbue a bit of humor in these really strict and minimal shapes. I try to give them a bit of life. Usually minimal art is very serious and kind of intellectual.» Small, Rachel. «The Abstractionist», Interview, 17 Dec. 2014

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