



Cage, 2019, courtesy of the artists & Christine König Galerie
Foto: Ludger Paffrath

Gabriele Fulterer & Christine Scherrer

Darkroom

February 8 – March 31, 2019

The “Kabinett” space, stripped of its usual direct access and its windows, becomes a lightless, dark space accessible only by going around several corners. Its ceiling of heavy wooden beams reinforces a gloomy, constricted atmosphere. The space becomes a “cabinet”, a “chamber” even, revealing a strange intensity: Here, a cage made of aluminium and steel—with its crossbars held together by industrial latches—is suspended from the ceiling in the room’s centre. Illuminated by ultraviolet light, the cage floats in a grey zone between painting and sculpture. Its seeming fluorescence suggests an oversized object or an abstract form that might have sprung from a “darkroom ensemble”.

Gabriele Fulterer (*Mürzzuschlag, 1967) / Christine Scherrer (*Salzburg, 1967) have been an artist-duo since 2007 and live and work in Vienna.

www.fulterer-scherrer.com

Gabriele Fulterer & Christine Scherrer. *Darkroom*

Text by Séamus Kealy

Gabriele Fulterer and Christine Scherrer are an artist duo based in Vienna. Since 2007, they have been collaborating as artists on interdisciplinary, immersive, and performative works, as well as with sculpture, drawing, painting, and embroidery. For the Salzburger Kunstverein, the artists have created a new installation called *Darkroom*. Before one enters the gallery space, a wall drawing greets the visitor. Being a reproduction of a sketch of the back of “Martina,” a sister of one of the artists, the sketch’s ambiguity in form and gesture creates a kind of open framework for what one will encounter within.

Upon entry, one finds that the Kabinett is here made into more of a chamber than a gallery. The light and atmosphere is akin to a small abandoned rave or an empty sex club. Hanging from the ceiling is a large cage made of aluminium and steel—with its crossbars held together by industrial latches. Illuminated by ultraviolet black light, the cage floats in a grey zone between painting, sculpture and the many associations the cage itself bears. The form and colour of the cage makes references to a history of modern painting, especially the more colourful periods of post-war abstract expressionism. The frames on the cage appear themselves to be accurate renderings of the framing used to house canvas for large-scale paintings as well. The overall structure is also reminiscent of more underground activity, including bondage or even perhaps S+M. The artists themselves are often working around themes of sexuality, identity and gender, as concepts that themselves slip and slide between different notions and constructions in their work. Here, these themes again collide in a combination of a “friendly modernism” (the cage and its aesthetics) with “counter-culture.” The effect is altogether playful, while also cognisant of the struggles of meaning and theory around nailing down language and terms for a formal analysis of, for example, abstract expressionism. The famous art critic Clement Greenberg wrote extensively about post-war abstract expressionist painting, elaborating and refining notions such as “kitsch,” theorizing on “pictorial flatness,” or inventing concepts such as “allover paint surface” or “optical space.” This exhibition, while recasting key references to this history of painting, relies on an active ambivalence and playful resistance to meaning. Where Greenberg called for abstract art to resist the intrusion of politics and commerce into art (which it ultimately and continually failed to do) and to instead unfold as a greater avant-gardism, that for him, was unfolding in a tradition, as an ongoing canon, the *Darkroom* exhibition playfully undermines many of these high-brow, grand associations historically bound with abstract expressionism. These associations would also include the frames of reference posited by these artists and their supporters and of course the naïve purity of the art theory heroizing it, its patriarchal dominance (being mainly by white American men and housed often permanently in large institutions, whether museums or New York galleries), and its ongoing instrumentalization for and within a greater, even international, social-political framework.¹ Scherrer and Fulterer, who in conversation complete each other’s sentences, themselves, are engaged with their work also on a formal level that is instead pulled into the service of, as they say, “working on ideas but offering no solutions.” Therefore a play on associations such as rave culture, bondage, or open and non-binary sexuality combined with the visual language of post-war abstract painting is altogether a light, playful but not altogether ungentle rejection of the very art historical canons that are directly appropriated in the work. The artists do not situate themselves opposed to anything here; they just really see no need to carry any unnecessary burdens that they do not themselves feel to be important. This is arguably an expression of open artistic freedom inherent in the dualistic conceiving, collaborative production and public reception of their artwork.

¹ In *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Serge Guilbaut argues that abstract painting was supported and instrumentalized by a larger system of US imperialism, from the New York Galleries and the personalities associated with them to a long string of American museums, to art critics, to the US government and CIA as a larger strategy of US domination globally.

Likewise their upcoming exhibition this spring at Künstlerhaus Palais Thurn und Taxis in Bregenz will be called "Hard Core," and will consist of 25 "bondage paintings," including wall drawings. When making their work, they take whichever aesthetics and tools they wish—whether those for bondage (the straps) or elements of fetishism in the form of a hanging cage (that could be used for domination, torture or sadomasochistic pursuits) here in this exhibition. Here an uneasy tension resides openly within an overall playful ambivalence that is—importantly—mindful of art history but not anchored down to its terms.

List of works

Untitled, 2019

Acrylic on wall

300 × 50 cm

Cage, 2019

Fluorescent acrylic / fluorescent industrial lashing on aluframe

209 × 109 × 109 cm

All works courtesy of the artist & Christine König Galerie

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Hours Exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7pm

Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fri 11am-11pm