

CINNAMON

Riette Wanders

Successor

December 12 , 2020 – March 12, 2021

In her second solo show at the gallery, Riette Wanders (1966) shows a series of new textile works. While rooted in her drawing practice, the new works venture into a more painterly realm, while their tactile nature also anchors Wanders' visual language in a more 'everyday' materiality - the intimacy of the work is no longer *just* derived from the gesture of the drawing hand, but also from a thread-and-needle type of concentration.

The show's title *Successor* could be interpreted as a statement: *I am a successor, standing on the shoulders of giants*. Wanders' work breathes an understanding of the idea that contemporary art can no longer be understood as groundbreaking and radically new *by definition*.

However, this nominally outdated Modernist idea persists as a subconsciously conditioning force, as a 'tradition of continuous revolution that urges us to denounce the old in reverence of the new. In our current time frame, the 'new' covers a (re-)politicisation of contemporary art from a left-identitarian perspective. without negating the urgency of certain political issues, we could ask ourselves whether art is a proper vehicle for activism. Isn't arts innate rebellious spirit to be found in the very *resistance* against univocally overruling perspectives?

The Modernist Idea was also concerned with the form vs content dichotomy. Though throughout modern art history, and within art criticism, the emphasis has varied, the avant-garde movements have aimed to reconcile this dichotomy. Utopianism propelled modern art into abstraction, content found its expression in form, in gesture, in and substance in material: formal developments were often – but not always– politically or socially motivated and interpreted. We only have to think of Adorno's intellectual but fierce defenses of abstraction, and, above all, autonomy in art: according to this theory, art's critical function can only exist in, and because of, its autonomy. This idea might seem as outdated as the idea of a continuous revolution (both ideas can historically not be separated, which is not to be discussed here), but we can retain the core idea that art's critical function can be found in *negation* – in what it is *not*. A complimentary function can be found in *affirmation*: affirmation of life, life's materiality, energy, chaos.

Once the pinnacle of artistic radicalism, an abstract-autonomous vocabulary is no longer considered radical. This has led to a schism of sorts: while favoured by collectors, abstraction and 'style-ism' have become suspect in a part of the institutional art world, a situation that reinstates a de facto form-content dichotomy.

Abstraction, in my opinion, is not a prerequisite for art's critical function, but it is certainly not hostile to it, as might be assumed in this day and age in which more anecdotal and explicitly political practices are preferred. Successful art always exists in the marriage of that which is individual and that which is universal.

The work of Riette Wanders non-explicitly touches upon these issues. The idea of the successor criticises the idea of continuous revolution and breaking with the past, but her work also makes a case for abstraction, materiality, energy, and chaos. Wanders' work is life-affirming, the critical is an auxiliary function *in negatio* of political explicitness.

Wanders' works in blacks, whites, and greys. In the absence of color, other elements like texture, structure, and composition come to the fore, and Wanders masters all these facets. But more than anything, Wanders' work revels in its *material* presence. In her previous drawings (not on view now), this manifests as blackest black of Siberian chalk, or subtle drip of watery acrylic paint on bulging paper, giving the work an almost prehistorical (or at least a-historical) feel. In the new textile paintings, a layering of fabrics, patches, and stitches reaches a similar effect. The large works in the main gallery works are expressive, unapologetic, somewhat dirty, and boldly flaunting their imperfections. Paint has been applied in splashes, or with a roller, half hidden by parts of mosquito-net or crossed with lines 'drawn' with a sewing machine. This is intuitive chemistry; it's as if we witness a universe in the process of self-actualisation, stopped mid-process and recorded by the artist. The smaller works in the salon are cleaner, these are the gems unearthed from the worlds that have emerged from the creative chaos we witnessed in the larger gallery space.

In Wanders' work, 'head' meets 'gut'. The work sings of the upright ape that thinks in abstractions, feels in rhythms, and gropes its way through the world; a maker, a thinker, and a feeler. Thinking of music might help us understand Wanders' working method. The works are made in a way that is comparable to the way a musician puts together a song: jamming, playing, stacking themes and rhythms. These building blocks are abstract yet at the same time very concrete.

Romantic and boundless, sometimes dark but always full of zest, Wanders' abstract

black and white works touch upon a fundamental experience - a *living* experience. One of stacking, hissing, fluttering, squeaking. Rattling, swimming, drowning, burning. Cutting, chopping, blossoming, erasing; binding, and bulging.

Ultimately, the meaning is in the making.