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The Presence of Friederike Oeser

A slice of watermelon, the freshness of grass and the tang of lemon, the sweetness of strawberries and the sense of closeness to the sea... These typical summer images are the first associations that come to my mind when observing the work of Friederike Oeser. This is probably because of her palette of brilliant colours, the lightness with which various forms are mixed together but above all because of the intensity of the works and their affirmative intonation. There's no hint here of the cold and damp – introspection or melancholy. Friederike's works are wakefulness, not dreaming, determination not uncertainty, action not patient waiting. They convey a vigorous involvement in everything that life is up to, be it petite or grand, which results in an enviable "here and now" directness and an unmediated presence that is conceived to the last detail.

This sense of presence is by no means static or fixed; in its abundance it is more a case of being spread out in many small motions and scenes whose range of characteristic forms is so broad that to capture them all in some stationary description would be impossible. It is true, the *Cut-Outs* series can leave the impression of disarray, even chaos and the crisp of the forms and lines is further highlighted by the quiet atmosphere of the gallery where these works are on show. It seems that unexpectedly we have become witnesses of scenes from the life of, let us say, a temperamental Italian family. Outcries, gestures, the tangle of voices and intonations, the noise of a slamming door, laughter... However awkward these episodes tend to be, I assume they too bear a manifestation of a kind of presence based on both an uncontrollable urge to become involved in the course of one's life and the need to make oneself heard.

The impression of confusion, however, quickly fades away because, when looking more carefully, it becomes evident that the compositions are remarkably balanced while retaining the impression of informality and spontaneity. The artist has successfully arranged her expressive images (this hot-blooded Italian family) giving every colour, shape and line both space in which to articulate itself and independence from its neighbours as well as the sense that the very element is the key to the work's visual appearance. It really is impossible to tell the centre from the periphery, nor to determine who is playing the lead role and who is only a supplement. Using a fine diplomacy, Friederike has managed to achieve a situation where surfaces overlap, colours get mingled but the lines unfold and flow away so freely as if they haven't been drawn by a human hand but by accident.

In addition, the three-dimensional structure of the works brings certain dynamics, especially because these *sculpture-drawings*, as the artist calls them, indeed remind of spatial drawings (this continuity can be easily seen if one takes a glance at Friederike's earlier works.) In one's imagination the individual parts of these compositions might even begin to move as if activated by some secret mechanism, turning about their axes, swinging up and down like a colourful carousel or masked theatrical performance. This idea is perhaps not a coincidence

because Friederike admits she is often inspired by industrial objects and mechanisms, the bustling traffic in cities and the flow of people in them; a good many of her works have been produced while working in deliberately selected locations in various cities around the world.

These sculptures really do include something of the rhythm of cog wheels turning and the restlessness of the city that never sleeps. However, the artist has considerably softened the urban references by growing creepers around the rectangular buildings and arranging gardens in the paved courtyards. The artist's fingers smeared with oil pastels bring to mind the dirty hands of a gardener after having finished working with the soil. Direct interaction with the surface, human warmth and the slippery oiliness of the plane are the contact points that enable thinking of the sculpture-drawing in these, working the land, categories too – only the scale is smaller and more intimate.

The mechanical and organic are just some of the juxtapositions that coexist surprisingly well in Friederike's works. Their wide, unsystematic network of references contains the brightness of pop art, impertinence of graffiti, gesticulation of abstract expressionism, the sharpness of cubism, uneven texture characteristic of assemblage, Kandinsky's clarity of colours as well as something indefinable, a bashful naïveté. Interpretation of the works however is completely in the hands of the viewer; the artist has no wish to restrict this process by making any kind of allusions. Her brief comment – *I work in public places to transform things I see, hear or read into a new language* – does little to help those who try to “decode” the hidden clues to real geographical locations in Friederike's works.

I doubt whether this new language generated by Friederike is a finite system, that is, a totality of defined symbols that one could learn by heart – in this case it is probably more accurate to think of a language as a succession of particular “speech acts”. Namely, her artworks, although they might be included in a greater body of stylistics, which will then be called the “artist's style”, in every case reveal something yet unseen and presumably unrepeatable. To understand this spontaneous language that becomes complemented with newer and newer components over time could be a difficult task. It can encompass both sketches of impressions, an assembly of objects accidentally passing by as well as expressions of thoughts or feelings – like those squiggles in a notebook that only their author can decipher. The title of the works *Cut-Outs* also indicates a certain detachment, the inaccessibility of the initial context. They are indeed *cut out*, yet the question persists – out of where? The intrigue of the whole series holds upon this quandary.

A rather different intonation can be felt in the *Plexi Cut-Outs* series (made on acryl glass). The composition of these works is more balanced with an accent on the centre, more subtle colours and more refined forms are in use here. Look more closely at, for example, the carefully serrated edges, the proportions and distances between the parts or the exquisite ornament that covers these surfaces as if they were petals of a rose! From the mild, bluish smoke of early morning and rivulets of raindrops on a car windscreen to the dazzling fans of dancers and a fashionable dress from the season's new collection – the associative network of these works stretches quite far. In this series the artist's sense of composition has become

even more refined but the execution has taken on a feminine gentleness and even coquettishness. Although 21st century technologies are used to create these works, nevertheless in terms of suggestion they lead in another direction. This series allows us to perceive the sense of presence already mentioned earlier in the context of a new spatial metaphor – like an asymmetric kaleidoscope with interchanging crystals of rain-washed thoughts and feelings.