

Laura Schawelka

A Sticky Thought

May 17 – June 29, 2024
Opening: May 16 / 6 pm

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Lakshmi's Lid

There were those who questioned the writer who traveled from California to New York in order to read a few short stories from the back of a bookstore that was itself located at the back of an art museum. But those who questioned her must not have known the satisfaction she felt when one of the speakers before her, while reading, timed the opening of her beer perfectly, so that the scraping of the metal of the lid, along with the burst of air suddenly released from the can, demonstrated precisely what she had to say about the nature of the fetish.

– Stacie Vos

A Sticky Thought

In her work, Laura Schawelka considers the question of how value is created and generated—in museums, archives, or even in commercial spheres. As part of this, she examines different modes of presentation and display and their ability to attract attention. While the autonomy of the artwork has been emphasized throughout the history of art, since the end of the twentieth century there has been an increasing focus on the “power of display” (Mary Anne Staniszewski). Its significance goes beyond exhibition architecture and techniques, and also includes visual user interfaces as a point of interaction between humans and machines, the public and the exhibition—and also between consumers and retail spaces.

The installation in the exhibition *A Sticky Thought* evokes the minimalist aesthetics of a showroom, the space traditionally used by retailers to present goods for sale. The only difference is that these displays, which upon closer inspection can be identified as clothes rails, do not present traditional consumer goods, but have become exhibition objects themselves. They support photographs printed on Plexiglas whose subjects also function in the same way: jewelry display stands and highly enlarged, detailed views of marble are used as backgrounds. At the same time, they also serve as formal supports for the classically framed, contrasting photographs, which thus become goods themselves. While the displays transform the various media into sculptural works in the space that interact with each other, the walls of the gallery remain largely bare.

For the exhibition, Laura Schawelka explores the presentation techniques of architects Franco Albini (1905–1977) and Carlo Scarpa (1906–1978), whose approaches to exhibiting have had a lasting influence on art history since the 1960s. They developed innovative modes of display that liberated paintings from the wall and transferred them into architectural space. Scarpa's exhibition design process synthesizes space and artwork into an overall composition and creates a dialogue between work, space, and viewer. In a similar way, Albini sought to transform two-dimensional paintings into sculptural objects by means of bespoke mounts, plinths, and easels in order to establish a staged compositional context, so-called “spatial pictures.”

Schawelka takes up this concept of presentation, in which there is nothing on the walls and the photographs, videos, and displays are instead presented as a sculptural image space, thereby creating a connection between consumer aesthetics and museum presentation formats, and, moreover,

demonstrating the parallels between them. By using the clothes rail as a found object, the museum presentation of photography is conceptually linked to commercial presentation techniques in stores that direct the attention, gaze, and movement of the consumer. The utilization of commercial aesthetics and photographic staging techniques, such as blurring, cropping, and zooming, almost disguises the fact that the marble was not carved by the ancient sculptor Phidias but by a robot, and that the hands are from a waxwork of Laetitia Casta—a perfect imitation?

— Katrin Rollmann