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Out of the blue into the black
2017

“Out of the blue and into the black”, a line from a Neil Young song, now written down and glowing in blue light, in a font acquired via photographing spread cassette tape that has been arranged to form letters, and showing the amplified version of it, catapults us straight into Helene van Duijne’s vast, self referential Oeuvre. Here, her cosmos is reaching out and assimilating to the questions the exhibition theme poses. Besides tapping into the evoking of the melody and voice that belong to the song that is partly presented in words, it is also referring to the mechanics of the art work (in reverse!), for what we see is actually blacklight, translated into blue hues according to the capacity of our eyes. The other verse on display, derived from the same song, “There’s more to the picture than meets the eye”, resonates in unison with the often unexplored abysses of our psyche, not seldom imagined simply being black. But it also corresponds to the processes that go unnoticed by the onlooker, physical laws in action and technological requirements we do not see.

Blue is traditionally tied to psyche, to certain moods and states, to calm, withdrawal, meditation and mystery. Water, air, the sky, all are, due to early conditioning by children’s books, associated with blue (and this connotation persists even after more realistic depictions of elements in a broad range of colors by i.e. JMW Turner).

Different forms of recollection are one of the pillars our entire society rests upon, all information in the cosmos, regardless if as forerunning idea or in the aftermath of something that has happened, is saved on diverse carriers, and recollection is what the lightbox works engage, too: given that the song is known, the transference of words that are normally uttered into sound, here being written down (as mentioned above on part of a nowadays rare, but not long ago a rather common sound carrier through which information is being transported, but used in a for the medium diverted way), will inevitably re-sound in the audience’s head, it may even stir up personal memories. This process analogises how information is being distributed and this mixture of complexity and boldness within Helene van Duijne’s already multiplex body of work reflects the manifold planes affected - when neurological, collective and customary changes are being induced. Regardless of interchangeability of media, the informational distribution remains immanent and in some cases, as with in the relation between language and speech, the inherent aim is nonetheless accurately preserved.

Recollection is also important to national identity, the constant depiction of traditional regional artefacts (in part leading to a regional history of tools),

outlines a local anthropology and bonds locals via ancestral utilization of territorial givens, such as turning molluscs into cups or small shovels, an extension of using an arched hand.

With Helene van Duijne having relatives in the Netherlands, and the Netherlands, unaffected by Metternichian cultural developments and thus comparably less yielding to privacy, having a rich culture that largely revolves around rather exposed homes’ interior, her personal memories of holiday visits to her grandmother are intertwined with the - to her - discrepant interior of Dutch habitats. Regional artefacts for the Dutch were partly owed to sea related calamities, which brought forth a plethora of symbolic paraphernalia, i.e. molluscs, who are firmly anchored in the Dutch population’s canon. Personally she has witnessed this particularly Dutch fondness towards objects that stem from regional nature finding expression in its implementation as decorative equipage in the home.

The influx of novel Chinese imports to Europe triggered a frenzy that managed to reach several cities, i.e. London (tea, opium, china, porcelain) and Delft (Delft stoneware is fashioned towards Chinese porcelain patterns). Those places have absorbed Chinese elements and kept such in their cultural catalogue to this day. In the same way that molluscs (in terms of extension) correspond to the hand, incorporated other-cultural elements signify a - perceived! - territorial expansion. Molluscs call to mind the shape of our ears, often though also of our mouths. Placing our ears on a shell, we can hear the swoosh of the ocean, which links us to the sound element in many of her other works. By installing molluscs on brass sticks that are resting on a wooden base (the base is inaccurately corresponding to the silhouette of the molluscs, like an imprecise shadow) and stationing them so they are slightly facing each other, a conversation seems to be implied, but both are neither ear nor mouth. Cardinaly we register the inherent comicality, delving deeper yet, we could detect some frustration at the underlying tautological property, however obvious and instantly processed through humor, the molluscs’ shape assuming a farcical quality.

The etymological roots of ‘Porcelain’ touch upon molluscs, stemming from the Italian word ‘porcellana’, presumably owed to a certain kind of mollusc with white, shimmering surface, akin to the gloss of porcelain.

Furthermore, similar to how molluscs function as a precursor to sophisticated tools and machinery, the sudden popularity of everything chinese upon its first discovery by the European west may be seen as an ancestor to global analog connectedness.

While large populations are privileged to be connected via digital means and enjoy all the benefits that come with the internet (initially invented for military purpose), the web simultaneously bears hidden dangers, lurking in so called web cookies, that may hide trojan horses, a digital virus, well known to be used for data theft and sabotage. Horses, a broadly

popular, classical motif of art and crafts, due to being a universal symbol for velocity, majesty, strength and power, were also used by Delft stoneware as an ornamental element. Nowadays, horsepower still stands for speed measurement. Perhaps Helene van Duijne is illustrating the accelerated mobility of the internet via contextualization of the symbol “horse” within internet related semantics.

The pun inherent in van Duijne’s horse, made of cookie dough, that is candied but held together in its middle by a piece of wood and placed on a surfboard, reminds of the bait needed for a trojan horse to gain access to one’s data, it must be covered in sugar so to say - previously valued as a quick energy fix, carbs are viewed skeptically today as proteins gain popularity. Turning into sugar and starch, with the word having its origins in the German ‘Staerke’ or the Dutch word ‘sterken’, which translates into ‘to strengthen’, Helene van Duijne’s cookie dough horse analogises the benefits and traps of internet surfing. Cookies are not thought of as dangerous, though they are not entirely void of harm for they register our surf-behaviour which then is used as the basis for surreptitious advertising, they therefore actually hold a lot of influence. Especially their name suggests sweetness and innocence, which of course, we like. We additionally always receive a warning from the visited site that cookies are in effect, which makes us even more relaxed about it. Despite governmental efforts towards transparency regarding ingredients, edible cookies, and that is true for most food, retain some risk, for the routine from food production site to the shop, and from the counter to our mouth is accelerated too and can prove quite difficult to consistently authenticate or know about the product’s ingredients.

The Abalone covered in epoxy and greeting one with a blue bottom plays with its own fragility and the means of perseverance during transport, hints at the extent of the broadened attainability of goods, but points nonetheless back to the roots of conscious, once very fashionable absorption of foreign, “exotic” particulars into one’s own culture.

A found piece of printed fabric with photographed, presumably chinese, porcelain as the motif, Helene van Duijne arranged the installation on the floor in the shape of a mollusc, having placed on it real molluscs that are resting on actual plates. At first sight the objects added by her appear to be part of the photograph (looping back to the verse on the lightbox, “There’s more to the picture than meets the eye”) and only by looking closely, we discover the three-dimensional components of the installation. Even in stasis it explores the exhibition’s question about motion blur, and once more we are urged to think about our innate incapability to recognize all functionings employed.

We can also see heterogenous influences fused in the sand covered oyster (a relic found on a construction site in Vienna, that has taken place at the ‘Viennese basin’, territory in Vienna that formerly hosted the sea), that van Duijne inserted into a clay bowl she has made herself. Like an anthropological timeline, we have a primitive tool, the oyster, placed into an optimised version thereof. To produce a dish made of clay, one has to impact the originally soft substance with heat in order to change it into firm material.

The connotations to psychological conditions, heat and acceleration left traces in language, the rather new expression ‘burnout’ reflects on one of our rather contemporary symptoms. This resonates in the mirror installation shown by van Duijne, this time the title of a widely successful Bruce Springsteen song radiates in red hot color when switched on. But are the letters burning or glowing until they have faded? Why are we confronted so bluntly with our own reflection, does this suggest latent but commonly overlooked (until the unbearable stage is reached) danger that could befall any of us? Unlike blue, which is able to evoke stillness, red is usually associated with motion. Fire, even when in its firmest, contained version, moves, flames never rest. This is definitely a concern for each of us and if we think about how fire is extinguished, we once more arrive at water and blue.

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