

VIENNA

## Carola Dertnig

GALERIE ANDREAS HUBER

In Vienna, the ghost of Actionism appears at regular intervals—whether in the form of pride in this homegrown avant-garde or disdain for its phallogocentric ways. The iconic films and photographs of bodily aggressions and transgressions—both real and fictive—that defined this

movement are vividly inscribed into the collective artistic unconscious in a country still contending with its wartime complicity with National Socialism and its deeply entrenched patriarchal structures. Carola Dertnig's recent exhibition "... at least I did not rob a bank . . ." tried to move away from this historical burden to reframe Actionism as a citation through which to expand the contemporary possibilities of painting and performance.

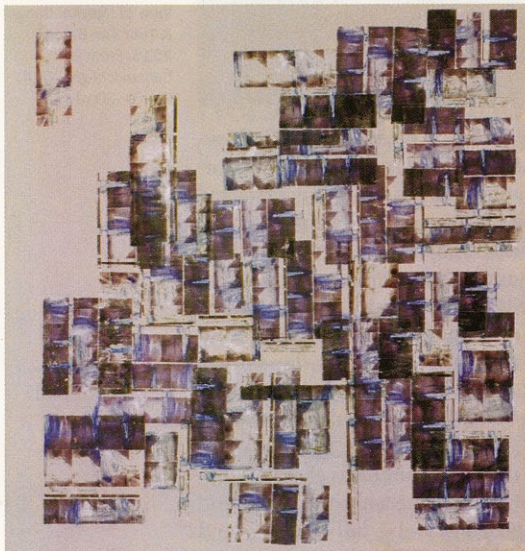
Rather than returning directly to the abject materiality of those bodily gestures, however, Dertnig considered the celluloid apparatus of their "capture" as both brute matter and channel of mediation. To produce the works on view, she

reworked digital copies of painted film footage left behind by director Ernst Schmidt Jr., a seminal figure in Austrian experimental cinema who is perhaps best known internationally for documenting the Actionists. Using a labor-intensive photographic transfer technique, Dertnig integrated the traces of Schmidt's imagery into new painterly compositions on both stretched and unstretched canvas. While each resulting "collage" was composed of layers upon layers of fragments that were individually transposed and superimposed upon one another, Dertnig never erased

the trace of the original negative. Thus, to make . . . *a fine line* . . . (all works 2015), the artist constructed a geometric composition in which the image of the film stock offers a dark counterpoint to the whiteness of the primed canvas; in . . . *Marimekko ALMA* . . . , she used replications of the celluloid to fabricate a pattern evoking the textiles of the eponymous Finnish design company. Despite originating in film and carrying its index, these works test the limits of medium specificity by entering into conversation with the idioms of painterly abstraction and textile production.

Thankfully, Dertnig uses Schmidt's film stock as more than just a building block for ornamental motifs; she makes a thoughtful, if rather familiar, argument: An expanded field of aesthetic possibilities emerges from the paradoxes of activating a cinematic oeuvre based on the ephemeral nature of performative gestures. Case in point: . . . *VANILLA FUDGE* . . . entwines the dematerialized luminescence of the filmic experience with the singular painterly marks performed by Schmidt and Dertnig on top of a celluloid image representing a fragment of an anonymous body in motion. Meanwhile, in . . . *moreau moreau* . . . , the only work that moves away from the parameters of the canvas, the famous French actress Jeanne Moreau's pout is transferred onto a silk textile that, when lifted by the gallery visitor, reveals a print of Schmidt's contact sheet from which the image was culled and upon which Dertnig has made a drawing. In both instances, through the intermeshing of these diverse protagonists as equal partners in one composition, it appears that Dertnig tries to challenge the idea that either a performer or a medium can ever be unique, stable, or temporally bound. Whether we agree with this flattened equivalence between Moreau, her filmed image, and a drawing is another matter. One feels that the artist is attempting to liberate Schmidt's images from their historical context (and thus their historical burden), since the extant documentation is, in many respects, the strongest legitimating proof of the "live events" performed by the Actionists. Given the reliance of these interventions on documentation for their historical transmission, the question arises: How can such vitriolic challenges to the power of church and state be recognized and transformed, rather than rendered toothlessly ahistorical, through the power of the image?

—Nuit Banai



Carola Dertnig, . . . *VANILLA FUDGE* . . . 2015, photo on primed canvas, 57 x 55".