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Artist: Hans-Jürgen Mayer Venue: Galerie Nagel Draxler, Cologne Exhibition Title: A Touch of Cthulhu Date: November 19, 2020 - January 9, 2021 Click here to view slideshow Full gallery of images, press release and link available after the jump. Images: Images courtesy of Galerie Nagel Draxler, Cologne Press Release: A Touch of Cthulhu 1 Zombies are often interpreted as consumption icons. Zombies are those against whom those who can afford it erect walls behind which they entrench themselves. Because zombies act collectively, they ultimately overcome all obstacles. Through technical and genetic modifications, they continue to evolve into cyborgs and animal-human beings, a new species. At some point they set off into space. HJM The culturally mediated boundaries between animal, human and machine have become more fluid in the age of genetic and information technology. Already in the 1980s, Donja Haraway founded a new, feminist, emancipatory myth of the reinvention of nature with her essay of the century, Manifesto for Cyborgs, which appropriated the wonders of the techno and science avant-garde instead of rejecting them as male-dominated. The extremely creative output of futuristically staged aesthetics in film, fashion, literature and music of the 1980s should also be seen in this context. All this took place in a world that was still largely analogous. What was then still a lot of beautiful fantasy is now everyday life, just not so beautiful. As is well known, progress is unstoppable, but it has always disturbed people and frightened them, like everything that is different. Enthusiasm and defense exist parallel since the discovery of fire. Hans-Jürgen Mayer paints zombies that look like models, like women with techno prostheses and perfectly dressed human-animal beings. And stories, possibly millions of years old, that look like spaces. His repertoire naturally touches the aesthetic eccentricity of the 1980s, in which the beginning of his artistic work falls, but also the early realist artistic world of Soviet literature of the 1920s and 1950s. Not out of nostalgia, but in celebration of the emancipatory power of the different, which is rampant in these epochal niches and feeds the utopia of a non-anthropocentric world view. Despite the unrestrained voluntary transplantation of technology into all areas of life, the fear that there is less and less human (life) and more and more machine (death) in the human being still reigns in a paralyzing way today. Life is sacred, death is amoral, just like nature. But it is not at all about morality, but about distribution. Being human is a privilege. Between life and death, life flourishes. 1 ‘ Call of Cthulhu ’ is a story by H.P. Lovecraft from 1926. In his stories Lovecraft thematizes the insignificance of man in the face of an indifferent, infinite cosmos. Link: Hans-Jürgen Mayer at Galerie Nagel Draxler Artist: Sarah Kärrten Venue: Max Mayer, Düsseldorf Exhibition Title: Under the illusion of structureless splendor Date: November 21, 2020 - January 9, 2021 Note: A text by the artist is available here. Click here to view slideshow Full gallery of images, press release and link available after the jump. Images: Images courtesy of the artist and Max Mayer, Düsseldorf. Photos by Katja Illner. Press Release: In an attempt to please repeat that? "Can you please repeat that?" "I do you talking to?" "Can you please repeat that?" And so for and process, but it remains rooted in an exploration of the continued to percolate for Kärrten. In her text, No Hard Feelings, ‘ Twen ’ - Mothers Daughter assumed all of the repetition of mistakes, often unwittingly, passed down from wider concerns, namely the roles either assigned to or assumed whereby although each generation makes a number of structural change has occurred. The affix of ‘ Twen ’ - Aimed at people in their twenties, the readers were from Kärrten ground-breaking today. The designer, Willy Flekhaus, used in No Hard Feelings, ‘ Twen ’ could be considered conservative. In Kärrten's exhibition under the illusion of structureless splendor, the artist also folds in a critique of nostalgia. As with her prior collages, Kärrten adopts the aesthetics of advertising and merges those of a bygone era. A constellation of large-scale framed pieces of text and found imagery coalesce to form one artwork. The colours she has used in previous collages are soft and muted - it is not explicit to which time period they belong - yet they recall a 1960s mint-coloured Buick, or a rusty orange used in a piece of 1960s Formica furniture. In her latest collages the images are mainly taken from Twen magazine and placed alongside texts. Written by Kärrten, they poetically ruminate on the persistent issues that women face - domestic violence, intellectual erasure, every-day sexism, and objectification. THE POET (without them he could not have written a line of his work) (2020), is a three-part work that has a framed text as the centre panel, flanked by two framed collages. The same image of a woman in a black and white mini skirt holding a radio, is used in each, but its treatment by the artist differs. The original photograph was shot from below, so the viewer is essentially looking up at the woman's skirt. Her black tights and the shading help to obscure the view. The way she holds the radio against herself means that her skirt ripples slightly upwards on one side. In looking at this image I cannot help but think of the seemingly endless argument against victims of sexual assault, who are deemed somehow responsible because of the clothes they were wearing, of being sexually provocative. The text speaks of the (male) gaze, of the objectification of women's bodies, of fertility, of femininity. The title of the work points to the notion that women consistently support men's livelihoods - the woman behind the man. In both the sound piece TOSS ME MY LIGHTER, COULD YOU BABE? and the collage IN TUNE (even when physical incidents are not occurring, the mental atmosphere stays the same) (both 2020) abuse takes a central role. Where the latter's title speaks of the underlying fear that victims of abuse constantly live in, the former replicates the weight of this heavy atmosphere through a constant dull hum that ebbs and flows but is undeniably sinister. The voiceover speaks of frequent criticism, of repetition, of increasing alienation. The photographs used in IN TUNE are, by comparison, seemingly much lighter, as they show women in various stages of undress - one wears a white shirt with bare legs, another is lying down in her underwear. From a purely visual perspective, the images that Kärrten has used in these works are beautiful - they have that seductive grainy quality that you only get from old film photography. The sculpture LOOK AGAIN (you save much effort by leaving your meaning vague, not only for the reader, but for yourself) (2020) is reminiscent of a vintage advertising frame with moveable panels. The objects in the photographs are old fashioned pieces of sound equipment - radios and stereos - that have a certain aesthetic desirability. This is the kind of nostalgia that Kärrten is hoping to explore in this body of work. The nostalgic yearning for mid-century design has exploded in recent years - my generation long to fill our apartments with furniture that parents and grandparents could not wait to get rid of. Kärrten's focus on Twen plays into this narrative even further, not only because of its overly fetishized design, but also because it had its own nostalgic take on early modern typography. This cycle of looking back longingly, Kärrten seems to be saying, is another form of problematic generational repetition, or as Svetlana Boyko argues: ‘ In a broader sense, nostalgia is not only a sign against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. ’ In May, amidst the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic the writer Rebecca Solnit published a piece titled Masculinity as Radical Selfishness, which spoke of collective responsibility and the burden of care. She described that in America, under the stay-at-home decrees, in heterosexual two-parent families, women were doing most of the work - they became responsible for domestic chores and nearly all the home-schooling of their children. It was an article that I discussed with several of my heterosexual female colleagues and friends, who had each angrily felt the unfair burden of domestic labour and childcare responsibilities during this period. Just as Kärrten's personal reflection in No Hard Feelings resolved it was a stark reminder that as women, our collective progression is still found wanting, as these deep-rooted patriarchal structures keeps us bound to this circular conversation. Solnit concluded her article by stating that a cure for the gendered burdens of Covid-19, was in short, feminism. She wrote, ‘ feminism is just a subset of human rights and absolute equality would answer all those questions about what to do about coronavirus and nearly everything else. ’ One of feminism's principles is the admission of our mistakes, to learn from them and in doing so, find a path to meaningful change. Kärrten's latest work would seem to fall among this category. It is a brave meditation on one's own complicity in falling into the trap of upholding a stagnant system, still in need of radical revolution. Link: Sarah Kärrten at Max Mayer This week's featured exhibitions: Heinz Fleck at Lambda Lambda Lambda / Cécile B. Evans at La Salle de Bains / Mitchell Anderson at Maria Bernheim / Christine Sun

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