



DRINKS, SNACKS AND MAGIC

Works by Patrick Baumüller.

I was peaking into the windows of galleries along Schleifmühlgasse to see what's goin' on in route to beat the early Saturday morning rush for fresh fish at near by Naschmarkt when I came upon a show at a new gallery:

“OHNE MARIE GEHT AUCH HIER NICHTS!” (Same Here, No Dough, No Go) by Patrick Baumüller at the Michaela Stock Galerie in Vienna

The work viewable only from outside this early in the morning came across nonchalant yet suspicious in this particularly small but engaging space. A tin roof *“Mélange Cheminée”* associated with a shack to bootleg gin billows splintered conversations and other audio through multiple air vents and took up most of the floor space. A Spiro-graphic string contour drawing of the hood armament of a Rolls Royce *“Spirit of Ecstasy”* greets you at the door. On the opposite wall is a large photograph of especially prickly cacti with a declaration from Marie Antoinette, *“I'm afraid of being bored”* inscribed. A gang of Spiders the size of basketballs made of black bendy-straws held together with black tape for bodies the size of human hearts cling to the ceiling like flies on a wall.

But directly in my line of sight while peering through the window, glistening through a dark brown tinted glass door of a back room framed off with what I've found out later to be styrofoam bricks welded together by spray foam, a small neon dolphin is spotted ascending from a splash. I became remorseful and walked away wondering why it was necessary for this artist to exhibit in a space that had to share it with what looked to me to be yet another a gambling joint in Wien.

Now an artist is “lucky” to be fronted by a situation that exposes their prejudices, gets you out of your comfort zone and forces you to abandon the glossary you've stockpiled in order to negotiate through critical discourses and contexts in contemporary art with conviction and certainty only to be called out with staggering humiliation. It can only serve as an epiphany for someone like me.

You see they don't have OTB's here. Instead they have these sports betting shops that come off more like cafes with colored neon sports logos and the words Drinks, Snacks and Games blazoned through dark tinted brown glass windows and doors. The only sign to act as a deterrence to the wanderings of the under aged is a small decal just above the handle of the entrance that reads, *“Zuritt unter 18 jahre verboten”*. These depots of the despondent have sprung up rapidly through out Vienna. Some are their own domain while others take up residency in the rear of other shops.

So when I saw “flipper” splashing around in a back room through a shaded glass door with all the obligatory decals that adorn the entrance of a betting joint designed to bury you deeper in despair, it was actually *“The Lucky Dolphin”*, the installation and corner stone of the show that duped me into buying into the ills of my own misreading and intolerances.

Flash back to L.A. 1998

How one must have felt when carrying their unemployment check up to what by all accounts and appearances looked like a new check cashing depot conveniently and seemingly sprouting up under the cloak of night on Camden Drive in Beverly Hills, in the 90210 area. When in fact it was an installation where an artist modified the facade of the gallery and its front interior to exceptional representational detail to that of one of the many check cashing depots located in more “strapped” parts of the city where Rolls Royce hood ornaments are more likely to be found attached to the handle bars of gang members’ bicycles.

Pushing forward 11 years later in Vienna:

Though done on a smaller scale without the budget that this “palace of power” in “The Hills” provides the affect of Patrick’s “Gambling Room” was as poignant and even more leveling with cynicism indicative to the deft hands and disparate cunningness that Patrick assembles in these desperate financial straights.

What made this slight of hand so sly and stunning were the modest materials applied to the task of dealing with such socially relevant topics like money, wish-fulfillment and boredom. While others have “spent the bank” on fabricating work from some of the same resources used in the commerce and trade game (Diamonds) that helped take it all down, Patrick Baumüller uses resourcefulness and ingenuity to say more with less and resonates a more deafening eloquence without consorting with the “enemy” or in his terms, “*Marie*”, translated in colloquial terms means Dough.

My own performance based work makes me favor “*Fix is nix*” (Nothing’s for Sure) 2005. It predates with casual savvy the demise in the global economy. Patrick shredded the bank notes of the Austrian National Bank in Innsbruck and formed them into a sculptural version of the graphic bar (that indicates the downward curve for the Dow Jones Index back in 1929) and installed the structure as a hand rail that is the support one uses to ascend the steps necessary to gain entry into the bank’s higher levels. A site-specific piece, it engages the occupants of this public space by challenging their means to navigate and gain access. The piece maintains a rather inhospitable critical vein that refers directly and without compromise to the context in which it resides. I can’t imagine Citi Bank even considering a work like this for their Funding of Public Art Projects in New York and displaying it in the lobby of their building at 53rd and Lex.

Though Patrick Baumüller’s work is like church and cauliflower for me; in that it may not be necessarily visually engaging with all the trappings of the virtuosity of form. Or be the product of labor intensive processes backed by a wad of cash in order to fabricate objects 23 times larger than is necessary, in the way my prejudicial bad taste buds at times desire. But I know when I’m confronted with his work I am better for the experience and may be at least temporarily weaned off my appetite for the spectacle of excessive visual consumption and may survive with less and enlightened by the virtues of prudence

Bloody hell, the next thing you know I’ll be rolling my own cigarettes.

Alexander Viscio