

Galerie Max Mayer

Worringer Straße 64
40211 Düsseldorf

Eva Barto
Melanie Gilligan
Klaus Merkel

Crises in the Credit Systems

12.01. - 10.03.2018

In 2018 the left will be forced to take a look in the mirror as a result of two historical events: on one hand, the year will witness Karl Marx's bicentennial birthday; on the other, it's also been fifty years since the Paris student protests of 1968 initiated a long-overdue social transformation. Both occasions offer ample opportunities to comparatively question our present socio-cultural status quo. This seems all the more important with respect to 2017, a year of historical regress in precisely this field. In all likelihood, we will probably neglect thinking about *how* we look back and *what* exactly we have been overlooking. The exhibition *Crises in the Credit Systems* starts by considering the work of three artists from three different generations, who share an interest in fictional approaches to time and historical material, despite their use of heterogeneous media.

Historical reflection usually only takes place on the occasion of an anniversary and depends on a "tradition" of looking back: whatever seems culturally relevant in the moment is legitimated with references to a time more than twenty years back. Think of the politics in relation to reunification, or the Cologne art scene, both rooted in the nineties. What gets overlooked in the process is the *just-past*—that which is no longer contemporary, but not far enough back to be looked back on: the last decade when the decisions were made that immediately surround us as "reality." The exhibition's title refers to Melanie Gilligan's four-part video work *Crisis in the Credit System* from 2008, which was released only weeks after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank. In many respects, the work anticipated both the immediate and long-term effects of the events back then. The exhibition at Galerie Max Mayer attempts to situate this work in the time of its production, enabling a backward glance. The historical events shouldn't be seen as individual, consumable monads, but as things which are still ongoing and whose fragments are wholly relevant for the present. Against this backdrop, Eva Barto, Melanie Gilligan, and Klaus Merkel have developed their own artistic practices, which will then be juxtaposed in the exhibition.

The frame, or stage, in which this all takes place is the gallery, an intersection of historical reflection, contemporary production, and bets on the future. Within this specific temporal and spatial framework, (material) gestures are brought together and compared with an "outside," subsequently generating market value. According to Marx, all of our activities under capitalism are connected via the abstract equivalences of exchange value, and as a result total capital consists of the sum of these exchange relations. The gallery is a time-space where these relations are negotiated. With her work *Latecomers' overtimes* Eva Barto thus intervenes in the temporal parameters of exchange and changes their variables. The gallerist's watch, which determines the temporal framework of exchange, has been manipulated so that it runs four minutes slower each day. Subsequently, the gallery will remain open a little bit longer than the day before for the duration of the exhibition. The difference between standard time and the time the gallery runs on will be noted in a book to be displayed upon request. Time is the necessary constant for any exchange that aims at value accumulation. By manipulating this constant and employing it as an artistic fiction, she intervenes in the supposedly "natural" premise of capitalist trade and thought. The cliché idea of time's relativity is

overshadowed by the context of the capitalist preconditions for trade and value. Barto's work fictionalizes the parameter of time and creates an expanded functional context for the gallery and the exhibition.

The fictionalization of time, the supposed simultaneity of one's own thematic material, is a basic precondition for the conception of Klaus Merkel's works. His paintings, made up of several miniature recourses to older ones, present the artistic gesture as one of painting-organizing: from various existing paintings, he produces new and contemporary ones on the canvas. In *Crisis in the Credit Systems*, three works exemplary of his practice will be shown: *93.06.02* and *Gliederungsbild* visualize the ordering principle, the inserts, and their scales, while *02.10.02 Exhale*, one of the few horizontal works, exemplifies the studio situation, and the subsequent recourse to old paintings as material for new ones. Through the work's horizontality, which presents its constituent elements as though on a palette, it becomes clear how Merkel selects the structures and perspectives specific to his work from a form alphabet, which he then uses to give this simultaneity a form. As Hanne Loreck noted in her text *Display* about Merkel's work the terms "transfer" and "projection" are used in psychoanalysis in order to describe how mutual awareness and subsequent patterns of habit and desire are produced between people. Each of Merkel's paintings represents an intersection of various transfers from miniatures of other paintings; each one reassembles its vocabulary within new relationships. These two terms, which are also important for understanding Merkel's conception of painting, show how his working method is a highly subjective organization of painting "itself," which takes the complex relationship between medium, artist, institutional system, and viewer into consideration.

In the video work *Crisis in the Credit System*, Melanie Gilligan makes recourse to a figure often invoked by role players—archetypes of contemporary traders. When the oracle, the protagonist, makes predictions about stock prices in a trance, he makes the future available, opening up a future oriented perspective on the supposedly linear temporal axis. In episode three, the oracle can no longer make recourse to his subconscious, and the adored stock system collapses, letting the assumption of time as an invariable constant, the basic precondition of exchange and value, fall apart with it.

In a time when violence is practiced with the seeming inevitability of a fact, such artistic acts acquire great significance. Mysticism, the culturally determined fictionalization of supposed facts, is what characterizes the artistic approaches to the relation between time and material, which each of the artists manifests in the exhibition: Eva Barto reflects on the institution and works with time as a variable. Melanie Gilligan presents narrative and information as inseparable from subjective experience. Klaus Merkel psycho-systematically lets the invention of the painter turn in circles on the canvas. These artistic fictionalizations point towards the potential of an intentional search for historical and temporal certainty, which allows for a more finely differentiated relationship to the *just-past* and its potential for the present, especially in the context of anniversary celebrations.

*If it's known it could be better
If it could be better, it's already useless
only bring that which cannot be better before it's known
- Melanie Gilligan, Crisis in the Credit System*