

Megan Francis Sullivan
Privileged Information

01.08. - 02.05.2017

Opening reception: 01.08.2017 5-8 PM

Jasper Johns went out for a pizza, and when he came back the world had changed. Like the last rays of the sun the greatness of America seemed to abscond. What he had used to celebrate so skillfully through conceptual smartness and painterly niceness was disappearing in that very moment. Instead of a well-deserved ease after a blazing day, an abyss gloomily opened up in time and in space. All his beliefs and aspirations, all his hopes and thus his entire life seemed utterly worthless. The self-evident belief in the lead of the leading nation, which for decades had fostered not only his individual ambitions, but also his communal spirits towards politics, pop culture and avant-garde art, rushed towards that abyss. "Am I getting old?" he asked himself, "and is this just a symptom of senility or dementia? Or is there some truth in what I am experiencing right now, and might I have been truly senile when I was young?" He tried to ponder the suddenness of insight into *The Course of Empire*, and if the visionary experience of the inevitability of demise and decline might count as a sign of final wisdom or just as a reactionary fantasy.

His life had always been based on the assumption of national greatness. That the nation could be great in and through someone like him, and that this greatness would endure. He had survived not only the aggressive avant-gardes following him, the publication of an intrusive biography, the obtrusive lifestyles of his collectors and all the honors of the liberal world; if this does not count anymore you could give the flag painting right back to a candle-maker. And not even the beloved Cézanne he had acquired some 40 years ago, that boy stretching his arms as a balance into nature, can offer solace. The subtleties of greatness simply seemed to fade away. Instead, greatness by denial, exclusion, or gained by building a wall (or painting on someone else's) is taking command. All that shows only violence and a lack of real power; and thus the very idea to regain greatness can't be anything but the final indicator of its demise.

How crucial the idea of maintenance of real power had always been to him seemed overwhelming like a revelation in that moment. The power of the image-object, the power of painting as such was clearly rooted in the spiritual power of the nation and its destiny. A sense of fading Glory and Despair arose within him, resulting in stubborn anger. He wanted to stamp to the ground at the first signs of that pompous Reborn Empire, but this will not be enough. A bigger splash is demanded now, a sacrifice of epic dimensions perhaps. "The flag painting itself has to be destroyed", he thought to himself, "in order to challenge any sign of its demise and to create a space within which it could reemerge with even greater splendor." Suddenly, he could taste the pizza again, and the day seemed redeemed.

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Megan Francis Sullivan explores the differences in making and meaning, repetition and recreation, the ideological score and the material condition of making art. Like most of her predecessors in postmodern art she is interested in the effects generated by the appropriating act itself, however shifting the focus on to the level of speaking positions, historical narratives and a deliberate sense of fabrication in the making. Thus, there is never pure repetition, an unambiguous act of appropriation and referencing, but a mixing up of positions and messages, a constitutive displacement in between concept and form, painterly representation and contextual framing. What is happening in between these lines is not a pastiche but a plot, in and through which historicity can be acknowledged and confronted at the same time.

An artist book titled 'The Bathers (Inverted)', published by Kunsthalle Bern, designed in collaboration with HIT, and with a text by Anne Rorimer will appear in early 2017.

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