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Press Release

Laura Mietrup

... und bauen eine Leiter

7 September - 19 October 2019

Vernissage: 6 September 2019, 17h to 20h

Balzer Projects is delighted to present Swiss artist Laura Mietrup's very first solo show. Titled after a central work in the exhibition, "...und bauen eine Leiter" is carefully composed of a diverse, yet closely connected selection of drawings, sculptures and ceramics.

We have become accustomed to the fact that sculpture has climbed off its pedestal and spread about. Lines have been blurred between permanent and ephemeral, abstract and programmatic, installation and intervention. A plethora of materials which we have never before associated with sculpture, have surfaced. Mietrup's work plays with these dichotomies and ambiguities; her work is at the same time abstract and concrete, formal and playful.

"...und bauen eine Leiter" offers an in-depth view into Mietrup's artistic practice. Her training as professional gilder together with an academic fine arts education equip her with the tools to freely combine language and codes from all sides of the creative spectrum. She has for a long time been interested in language, symbols and signage. She also developed her own script which has been an integral part of her work. It looks like a secret code and is not easily accessible to the viewer/reader. The texts written in this code are diverse; during her recent residency in Paris, she started writing poetry.

All parts of "...und bauen eine Leiter" relate to one poem. It is delicately written in fine white letters on four impeccably white plaster panels. Placed on oak blocks, the panels are unpretentiously leaning against the wall. Despite their unassuming delicacy, whiteness and lightness, they set the agenda for the show. "Gedicht", "poem", the title of this sculptural set, is a humble, yet programmatic premise for the entire installation in the main space of the gallery. Apart from being the key piece, the four plaster panels epitomize Mietrup's artistic approach - lightness, elegance and ease combined with precision, accuracy and determination.

Mietrup uses text in an explicitly *visual* form. The letters look like runes with only few round elements; they form abstract, occasionally ornamental patterns. Therefore, it is not important that the viewer cannot decipher the artist's code. The different installational elements in the space can be read as cues to its content. Mietrup does not feel the need to share her code with the audience, yet the viewer is in turn not discouraged from trying to read the text. To counter a misunderstanding – it is not about keeping it a secret. On the contrary, the artist has created her own universe with its own narrative, language and symbols and jauntily moves about. In her understanding, translating and explaining text and symbols would "repeat" or "reproduce" the creative process, a superfluous and redundant undertaking.

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Mietrup's sculptures can be defined as much by what they are not and what they hold back as what they are. There is no exhibition that visualizes this as well as "...und bauen eine Leiter"!

Entering the main space of the gallery, the viewer approaches a quasi-surrealist scenario. S/he finds herself reminded of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" or Robert Wiene's "The cabinet of Dr. Caligari". Even Futurists and Surrealists such as Max Ernst and Giorgio de Chirico come to mind. Next to the entrance, a light-gray gouache directly drawn on the wall resembles an electric circuit or an instruction manual. Could be the plan for the exhibition? (The same formal language is used again in the five framed gouaches in the cabinet.)

There is a gilded ring on a black iron mount, appearing to swing off the ceiling, entitled "...und tragen einen Ring". A black ladder – not really usable or functional – stands opposite the ring at the other end of the room. The ladder gave the exhibition its title, and - at least if we trust what the artist reveals about her writing – it is also a line in the poem. So is the title of the ring installation. "...wir bauen eine Leiter ... und tragen einen Ring" ("...we are building a ladder ... and carry a ring"), certainly sounds like a line of the poem. But what does that mean? It cannot be verified at first glance, and therefore, it is not really important. The viewer is challenged to read the ladder and the beautifully hand-gilded ring independent, yet in conjunction with the poem.

Sixteen seemingly randomly (or carefully?) placed colored balls populate the gallery space. An object, reminiscent of a "club" with a large red ball on the bottom, a black "handle" and a smaller white ball on the top, is leaning against the wall. It looks like it that it had just been placed there interrupting a game, which is ready to be resumed. Is the club used to roll the balls through the gallery space... and or maybe hit them through the round openings of another sculpture, entitled "Das Fremde"? (Lose translation: "The strange thing", "the strange one") It is a white sculpture – resembling a factory chimney maybe with carefully placed openings of the exact size of the balls. Although the function of the club together with the balls appear concrete and self-explanatory, the title of the work, "Tarketa" is not. "Traketa" is a phantasy word. "Das Fremde" on the other hand, an object between form and function, furniture and sculpture, bears a very concrete and narrative title. Mietrup plays a game with her audience and enjoys it tremendously.

Behind the ladder, the whiteness of the wall is only interrupted by a white ceramic mask, the only one object that brings "the human" into this surrealist-dreamlike scenario. Entitled "Ein Wiedersehen" (the translation is not easy, maybe "a reunion"?), celebrates humanity, hope and optimism. Even happiness. Only the strangely surrealist-machine inspired face of the mask make the viewer stop in his/her mental path.

In the cabinet behind the gallery hang five gouache drawings - carefully curated and beautifully framed. They resemble compositions of architectural elements, electric circuits and machines parts. The red ball which we are familiar with from "Tarketa" finds is echo in all but the smallest of the drawings. The gray gouache wall drawing at the entrance of the space is mirrored here, albeit with a more complex visual vocabulary. The aesthetic of the gouaches reflect the narrative language of the entire exhibition. Yet, both parts of "...und bauen eine Leiter" can be viewed independent from each other.

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In her oeuvre, Mietrup questions the separation of art and furniture, art and useful objects, tools and machines. Her artistic practice is multi-faceted; she feels at home in many media, but her drawing, printing and painting practices use a predominantly sculptural vocabulary. She moves freely between furniture and sculpture and questions issues of signification, functionality and readability. Volumes, materials, borders and architectural hierarchies are permanently renegotiated and her work breaks through the boundaries of installation and display, always involving the viewer in the process. The functionalization of the sculpture in the exhibition, be it the ladder, the ring, the club and the balls runs counter to the ornamental abstraction of the gouache drawings in the cabinet. Her work is abstract, post-conceptual by nature; at the same time, it is figurative and oscillates between personal and universal.

Laura Mietrup (*1987, Rheinfelden, CH) grew up in a carpenter's family. Before she went to art school, she completed an apprenticeship in gilding of picture frames. Her attention to surface, form and appearance pays tribute to this ancient and almost forgotten craft. In 2017, she graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from the HGK/FHNW, Basel. She also received the prestigious Förderpreis of the BEWE Stiftung and was nominated for the Werkstattpreis Erich Hauser Stiftung.

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