

EACH MODERN

亞紀畫廊

史蒂芬·穆勒 — Kölischer 藝術協會

文／克莉絲蒂·貝爾，Frieze，2016

史蒂芬·穆勒的在故鄉科隆 Kölischer 藝術協會的展覽「Allerliebste Tante Polly」（最摯愛的波莉姑媽）是一堂關於自嘲策略的課。在綿長而兩側充滿一扇扇窗戶的畫廊中，左邊牆面被高度不一的手工籬笆隔開。在右側，大片的窗戶則穿透了牆壁，構成了一副如畫的庭院風景，在初春的陽光下盛開著玉蘭花。但是，在粉刷成白色的籬笆上綿延懸掛的 14 幅新畫並沒有試圖與窗戶清晰描繪的景色相互抗衡。它們的尺寸不同，分布也不均，並且懸掛在不同的高度上。它們自覺隨意的裝置暗示著一種讓繪畫本體進行協調的無所謂態度。當陽光照進來時，籬笆的木條所產生的陰影變化出現在鬆散編織的畫布之上。儘管受到光線與建築結構的影響，這些畫作在面對如此不利條件時保持了一種消極態度：它們的抽象儘管隨意，卻具有令人驚訝的彈性。

如此遊戲性的形式有時出現在皺巴巴的手工染色布面上，像極了一場意外：有時候是柔和色彩的圓形，有時是亮藍色或橙色的條紋。如瘀青般的誘人粉色定義了《Himmelhochaufgelöst und verstiegen》（在溶解與流淌的世界之巔，全系列製作於 2013 年）的斑駁畫面，像把呂克·圖伊曼斯畫作的角放大到無法辨認的地步，盤旋在黑藍地平線上方的黃色圓盤意指了傑克遜島上的短暫月初場景。充滿活力的櫻紅色、霓虹橘色、與綠色則是在展覽最小幅作品《Tante Polly's Garten》（坦特·波莉姑媽的花園）的原始亞麻畫布上脫穎而出。描繪銀色氣泡與太陽黑子的《Oh Happy Day (One Hit Wonder)》（噢，快樂的一天『一片歌手』）標題暗示了狂喜。穆勒使用補丁、水滴、炫光、與污漬製造了自我審視般的無趣。儘管這些方法有些無精打采，穆勒的畫作並不缺乏信心。相反的，它們正透過謙虛的外表破壞著繪畫中假定的重量。

粉刷過的籬笆既可以彌補在無牆空間中展示畫作的困難，也能是一種帶有敘事功能的實用結構。如展覽標題所指示的那樣，這正是波莉姑媽在馬克·吐溫 1876 年的小說《湯姆歷險記》中要求湯姆·索亞粉刷的籬笆。穆勒作品中重要的慵懶特色回應了湯姆油漆籬笆的策略，使他的朋友相信粉刷籬笆是出自於自願，而非被強迫：「喜歡嗎？好吧，我不知道為什麼我能不喜歡它」湯姆對他的朋友說。「男孩不是每天都有機會可以粉刷籬笆的吧？」這樣的寓言延伸到了穆勒自嘲式的作品與佈置。藝術家的繪畫行為，應該是令人討厭的義務，還是自由選擇的樂趣？正如同湯姆在一天結束後審視他所得到的獎勵時所說：「工作是身體義務性的執行...而玩樂是由身體不義務的執行。」那麼藝術家在這樣標準下，應該是屬於工作還是玩樂呢？穆勒的展覽規劃在義務與自由選擇的兩端中搖擺，巧詐與冷漠最終壓倒了強迫，義務的重擔交給了籬笆裝置，而自由交給了畫布本身，從此不受享樂或義務的限制。

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Stefan Müller - Kölnischer Kunstverein

By Kristy Bell, Freize, 2016

Stefan Müller's exhibition 'Allerliebste Tante Polly' (Most Beloved Aunt Polly), at the Kunstverein in his hometown of Cologne, is a lesson in strategies of self-deprecation. The left-hand wall of the gallery – a long space with banks of windows on either side – has been partitioned off by a hand-hewn fence comprising beams of differing heights. The broad picture windows that punctuate the opposite wall frame a picturesque courtyard with magnolia trees blossoming in the early spring sunlight. The 14 new paintings hanging in a row on the roughly whitewashed fence do not attempt to compete with the windows' clearly delineated views, however. Neither uniformly sized nor evenly spaced, and hung at varying heights, their self-consciously casual installation suggests a devil-may-care attitude in tune with that of the paintings themselves. When the sun shines brightly, the slats of the fence cast shadows that are visible on the delicate surfaces of the unprimed, often loose-weave canvases. Despite being adversely affected by light and architecture, the paintings seem to shrug in the face of such imperfect conditions: their abstraction, though casual, is surprisingly resilient.

The play of forms on the sometimes hand-dyed and still crumpled surfaces, veers towards the accidental: often rounded volumes or circumferences, marked out in a range of muted tones, sometimes accented with a streak of brilliant blue or orange. The seductive, bruised pinks that define the patchy surface of *Himmelhochaufgelöst und verstiegen* (On Top of the World Dissolved and High-Flown, all works 2013) could be a corner of a Luc Tuymans painting, magnified beyond recognition. A yellow disk hovering above an inky blue-black horizon suggests a tentatively rising moon in *Iris-Blende Jacksons Island*. Lozenges of vibrant fuchsia, neon orange and green stand out on the raw linen surface of the smallest work here (*Tante Polly's Garten, Aunt Polly's Garden*), while the silver bubbles and sunspots in *Oh Happy Day (One Hit Wonder)* suggest the levity and exultation hinted at by the work's title. Using a vocabulary of patches, drips, glares and smudges, the paintings wear their nonchalance with studied introspection. But in spite of their lackadaisical attitude, Müller's paintings do not lack confidence. Rather, through their apparently modest appearance, they set out to undermine the supposed gravity of painting at every turn.

The whitewashed fence, while a practical measure to compensate for the difficulty of showing paintings in this wall-less room, brings with it a narrative component. As the exhibition's title directs us, this is the fence Aunt Polly insisted that Tom Sawyer paint in Mark Twain's famous novel of 1876. The constitutional laziness that characterizes Müller's production finds its echo in Sawyer's delegatory tactics, conning his pals into believing that the activity of painting was freely chosen, rather than enforced activity: 'Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it,' Tom boasts to a friend. 'Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?' The allusion extends to Müller's self-deprecatory handling and installation of his works. Is the artist's activity of painting an irksome obligation or a freely chosen pleasure? As Tom figures out, appraising his winnings at the end of the day, 'Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and [...] Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.' Where does the task of the artist fall on this scale between work and play? Müller's installation wavers between the two poles of obligation and free choice. Compulsion is overridden by cunning and nonchalance, and the burden of meaning is delegated to the installation strategy, while the canvases themselves remain free to roam unencumbered in the realms of pleasure, or refusal.