

NIGHT GALLERY

Natasha Ginwala, “New Dawn,” *art-agenda*, July 30, 2014.

art
agenda

“New Dawn”

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When foraging for food in the wild, orangutans conduct an intriguing ritual known as the “fruit stare.”(1) It unleashes a mimetic contract hinged upon intentionality and co-presence. What makes the tree surrender its fruit? The practiced stare of the orangutan coaxes it into interdependency—and possibly, divulgence—while registering a temporal circuit between hunger and satiation. Earlier this spring, “A Fruit Stare,” Leidy Churchman’s solo exhibition at Silberkuppe, relayed a murky trail of auctioneering, police patrol, and torn legalities. Eliciting an immersive look from the viewer, his work featured fleshy exposures of immanent violence, which mimetically suture culprit and prey.

Following up on this solo show, Churchman has curated “New Dawn,” Silberkuppe’s current group exhibition, which includes commissioned works from a good number of its 27 participating artists, filmmakers, designers, as well as essays by legal scholar-activist

Dean Spade and sociologist and queer theorist Craig Willse. Michaela Eichwald’s painting *AUKTION fuer Leidy* (2014) is spread across the gallery façade, somewhat like a protest banner gesturing toward neoliberal society’s zealous adoption of every location as a potential marketplace, while also serving as a dedication to the artist-curator. This work, and the

exhibition as a whole, positions painting as a mode of “performative utterance”—as a constitutive site, where the force of an imaginary pushes beyond the field of description into an active manifestation of worlds that are a statement of fact.(2) Close to the entrance, Jutta Koether’s canvas *Aux Folies – K2 (Taverne du Passage)* (2013) commands the room with a stream of sun-drenched color—its deep orange, arterial-red-into-yellow tints glistening like bonfire embers. Opposite, Anna Rosen’s *Untitled (New Dawn)* (2014) condenses the temporal movement of solar passage—from eclipse to equinox, while Koether’s work closes in on an eerie bar scene: a punch bowl stands in as a cornucopia (has the bartender been replaced by a uniformed official?), and among the bottles of alcohol stands one labeled, “PAIN.” An innocuous fox smiles from a far corner.

The exhibition’s selected works echo a wide-ranging community of practices—peers, mentors, and heroes accrued through an artistic journey spanning from Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, to the southern Mojave Desert. Now returning a gaze upon Churchman’s painted world, including his latest body of work from “Fruit Stare,” and his pondering of the “painting-as-body,” these art works respond like empathetic knots—staring across one another—emitting what artist and feminist psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger would call a “matrixial encounter.” That tug of desire, between orangutan and fruit, is further transposed onto the viewer.

Halfway into the gallery a charcoal line on the floor softly curves, breaking from the geometry of the room to inhabit a space between sculpture and drawing. This work, Douglas Boatwright’s *Half Other* (2014), is smudged and smudging—as though it were an iteration from a night of messy lust. The line is raised to corporeal suspension in Nairy Baghramian’s sculpture *Eule [Owl]* (2007), which appears like a Bataillean form, transforming from a three-legged construction to a flaccid being at the limit of nothingness. “Love is so excessive a feeling that I prop my head up in my hands,” French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille once noted.(3) The specter of “excess” continues to pervade throughout the installation—its lightness and darkness resonant across the exhibition’s underlying themes of sexuality, consumption, and death. Xylor Jane’s canvas of numbers, *Leap Second* (2014), may very well be the notification of an accumulating casualty. Her tensile sequence is cast upon a painted grid reminiscent of the grimy tile mosaics found in Berlin’s U-Bahn stations. Nearby, headlights pierce metallic darkness, as Catherine Opie captures the cold threat of an

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approaching police squad in her pigment
print *LAPD* (2014).

Churchman's oil on linen *New Dawn Marsden Hartley Soutine* (2014), placed within the exhibition's final segment, is suggestive of a lover's portrait, and brings together several references. It draws from the rawness of French artist Chaim Soutine's (1893–1943) oeuvre, while also referring to American modern artist Marsden Hartley's expressionist portrayals of a young German officer, Karl von Freyburg, and their possible romance at the time of the First World War. This abstract symbolism is now delivered as a body of fantasy, ablaze in dramatic color and cast with a disarming gaze.

The display of Spade and Willse's photocopied essay, "Sex, Gender, and War in an Age of Multicultural Imperialism," elsewhere in the exhibition acts as a parallel address of the vulnerability of transgender bodies, specifically exploring the legal case of American soldier Chelsea Manning within the context of the United States's imperial warfare, LGBT politics, and more manifestly across the everyday militarism of neoliberal society.(4) By way of conclusion, A.L. Steiner's collaged print, *100% Sold Out* (2014), exuberantly refutes the policing of desire in its active regard of intimacy as a space of rebellion.

Instead of drafting a definitive curatorial statement, Churchman offers an exhibition note in which art historian Manuela Ammer inquires in lyrical form: "Who controls the border of painting? What is the border of painting anyway. The edges of the canvas?" These questions' self-congratulatory rhetoric suggests that the exhibition is the product of a circle of insiders. Yet, despite its jump-cut style and gestural naiveté, "New Dawn" is a sublime staging of the painterly form as a registration of affect and the exhibition format as a "medium" of contagion. The show offers a communal ground in which personal subjectivity negotiates a multifold "borderspace" where political life, the human-animal, and the cosmological meet. It fundamentally awakens our re-enchantment with a world whose sensuality is being systemically drained into unfeeling states of conformity.