

Sophie Schmidt, Knieberge, Galerie Tobias Naehring

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San Gennaro, the Italian patron saint of the androgynous, lives in a “room of one’s own” in Sophie Schmidt’s new works according to the accompanying text. In the essay of the same name, which is fundamental to feminism, Virginia Woolf declares that an accomplished author has to unite masculine and feminine qualities in herself, and that, consequently, creativity encompasses both genders. As femminiello, San Gennaro combines both genders in himself, and in Schmidt’s large-sized charcoal drawing, he appears to be blessing in a flowing garment with an almost baroque theatricality. At the same time, he shows the facial features of the artist. A distinct sex, without being socially constructed, is discredited as a limitation.

Dissolving boundaries and bodies are essential topics in Schmidt’s works, beginning by overcoming the genres of paintings, drawings, sculpture, performance and culminating in the transformation of organs and body parts. Feet breathe, lungs fly, the stomach replaces the head. Her works often oscillate between conflation and separation, devotion and distinction, vulnerability and protection. Accordingly, she initially feels that her locomotion machines are a second skin or a protective cocoon, and she blends in with them. Yet, while moving, they reveal their instability, they break and even hurt the artist. Meanwhile the destruction is an act of emancipation: “Get in, drive, break, free yourself. And so forth.” Only after this process, she says, she can breathe freely. Her fragile installations, that she constructs by assembling kitchen strainers, umbrellas, tights, hair dryers and plaster bandages, are made to be used, they are not for eternity. Her artificial limbs which she makes out of the same materials and calls body expansions and prostheses to overcome separation, dissolve her physis and bring her into contact with the world. In her performances, she exceeds her pain threshold and those of the viewers. She devotedly sings opera arias to explain her works and then ends up in one of her plastics in which she sucks in milk through tubes and this uncontrollable apparatus denies her the enjoyment of a cigarette, once the symbol of feminine emancipation. Her likening for fragile eggs, that she places in her installations, and insects is symptomatic. Their protective exoskeletons of chitin, their fragile legs and sensitive antennae, whose direct feeling she prefers to distant seeing, inhabit Schmidt’s imagery and smoothly transform themselves into sexual organs and vegetable materials. Exact observations in nature as well as intense investigations into cultural history, literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis feature here recognizably.

In the works she has created this year, Schmidt further develops her own cosmos. Her fascination for nature can be found in the seed heads and flower-like shapes which appear to have come from botanical textbooks and whose fragile beauty grows out of a Venetian chandelier. This beauty appears to be uncanny and violent when a hornet devours a cricket lying helplessly on the back, a flock of jet-black birds seem to motionlessly wait for something with their pointed beaks, and two turkeys with splendid feathers harass a hen. And the body of the artist is metamorphosized into a landscape or the eponymous knee mountain (Knieberge) if she observes her bent knees from her own perspective.

Text by Julia Dellith

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