

Gallery Weekend Berlin

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, Berlin

April 29–May 1, 2016

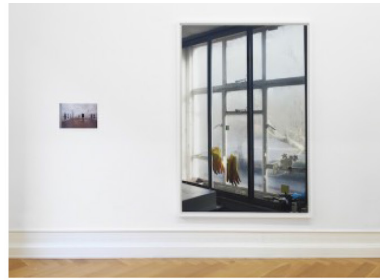
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When the 7 percent value-added-tax rate on fine art went up to 19 percent in January 2014, it spelled to many the end of the Berlin art world. Proclamations followed that the market would dry up, and collectors would scatter to more cosmopolitan locales with less pricey export taxes. Without patrons or a steady stream of capital, how could Berlin's artists thrive? The sheer volume of the jam-packed 2016 edition of Gallery Weekend Berlin suggests that the German capital's art market is healthy as ever in its upper echelons, especially given the pricey 7,000-7,500 euro gallery participation fee, though younger galleries, perhaps hit hardest by the VAT rate update and who have largely figured these new expenses into the prices of their offerings, have seemingly responded with conservatism.

Two outliers to this trend are Aleksandra Domanović's "Bull Without Horns" at Tanya Leighton and Alice Channer's "Early Man" at Konrad Fischer. Domanović's exhibition fills both of Leighton's galleries, and includes her now-iconic sculptures featuring the Belgrade hand. Most unique in this exhibition are her new portraits of bulls that have been genetically modified to prevent them from growing horns. The large-scale, documentary-style photographs come off as earnestly tacky in a way that, somewhat paradoxically, knowingly rejects any aesthetic associations with the dominant artistic discourse in Berlin, to which Domanović's practice has been integral. Alice Channer's "Early Man" at Konrad Fischer dumps two tons of black polystyrene granulate microbeads (technical term "nurdles") on the gallery floor, creating a black alien landscape which is dotted with rust-colored 3D-printed rocks. As the black nurdle sand is incredibly slippery, viewers become hyperconscious of their bodies navigating the gallery. Channer refers to this work, titled *Burial*, as a sculptural object rather than an installation, and thinks of her rusty Martian boulders as ciphers for a body. The body presented here is a horizontal one—perhaps an animal, or a human that is buried, as the title suggests. Channer's use of nurdles, which are found in organic beach sand as unfilterable ocean trash, further suggest a poetic reconsideration of the delimitation of bodies, as the porousness of skin constantly absorbs its environment.

In the same Kreuzberg building, Żak | Branicka presents work unearthed from the KwieKulik archive—one of Gallery Weekend's two outstanding historical presentations of underappreciated artists, the other at Exile, featuring Verena Pfisterer. The title work at Żak | Branicka is KwieKulik's "Monument Without a Passport," a series of photographs mounted to the wall in cinematic fashion. They tell the story of the artist duo declining an exhibition invitation outside of Poland amidst the country's communist rule and closed borders, and the performance Kwiek and Kulik made in response. While the work could be read as exceedingly specific to its historical moment, the notions of artistic freedom and mobility seem like incredibly timeless and prescient subjects. An eponymous 2011 documentary on KwieKulik screened nearby at fsk-Kino as a complement to the exhibition at Żak | Branicka. The film provided an enticing look into the daily lives of Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik, who, living in separate houses on the same lot, bicker in an endearing way only longtime artistic and life partners could, and who have in recent years recommitted to working through and presenting the KwieKulik archive since disbanding in 1987.

Verena Pfisterer's installation at Exile, titled "Aktionen an Arbeiten von Verena Pfisterer," was a surprisingly engrossing introduction to the work of this largely forgotten and incredibly idiosyncratic artist. Deceased since 2013, Pfisterer grew up in the small conservative town of Fulda, in central Germany, and attended the Städtelschule, in Frankfurt. Though she worked in proximity to many artists who were brought to the market via Art Cologne, Pfisterer, like many women artists of that era, was erstwhile not successful with sales. She focused rather on creating ritualistic works using religious imagery that must be enacted by a viewer. On view at the gallery are both her static sculptural objects and the Super 8 documentation of their enactment transferred to 16mm by the artist. In one action (*Rosa Kasten mit Stoffkreuzen*, 1970), she stuffs colorful handmade plush toy crosses into the cross-shaped opening of a vaginal red plush box, appearing akin to a perverse children's game. In another (*Schlappi-Kreuz*, 1967), she undresses and unhooks a body-size crucifix made out of what appears to be a mattress from being attached to the wall, and wraps her body around it as in embrace. It seems as if Exile is almost singlehandedly reviving the work of this sadly underknown artist.



1 View of Wolfgang Tillmans, "Studio," Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, 2016.



2 Aleksandra Domanović, *Bulls Without Horns: Making Of*, 2016.



3 Aleksandra Domanović, *Votive: Hare*, 2016.



4 View of Alice Channer, "Early Man," Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin, 2016.