

G E O R G K A R G L B O X

Press release

MATHIAS PÖSCHL
i'm every woman

Exhibition duration: 14 March – 30 April 2014

At the first encounter with Mathias Pöschl's work, one soon asks oneself why a young, white artist who lives in Austria is so interested in the idols and values of Afro-American popular culture and counterculture. As a former basketball player, Pöschl does in fact have a personal link to one of the traditional arenas of identity formation in the "black community". And yet his first solo exhibition at Georg Kargl BOX, which presents an assemblage of corresponding works that communicate on many levels, delves much deeper. Pöschl demonstrates a thorough exploration of the facts and symbols of Afro-American resistance and the ways in which they have entered contemporary trivial culture. His painstaking approach is rich in associations and displays a penchant for the documentary and the archival, imbuing his work as an artist with an affinity to scientific research and its method of formulating and testing hypotheses. Despite the relationships Pöschl postulates in his many-faceted investigation, he is not concerned with establishing a stringency of narration or attempting a chronological ordering of events: in a consciously implemented multiplicity of media and content, a subjective collage of meaning and interpretation is conceived to sharpen critical awareness and remind the beholder that references in cultural history cannot be evaluated along the lines of one-dimensional, objective criteria.

The hub of Pöschl's observations is the peacock chair upon which Huey P. Newton, co-founder and chairman of the Black Panther Party, a militant Afro-American civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, enthroned himself for the cover of his book "Revolutionary Suicide". As in a collage, the artist juxtaposes Newton's book cover with another photo featuring a peacock chair, here with the cockily posed American soul and pop singer Chaka Khan, whose first major hit "I'm Every Woman" (1978) also provides the exhibition's title. The photo and the book cover are presented alongside an autograph card of James Bond girl Honor Blackman. Through her book on self-defense, Blackman references the early history of the Black Panther Party, when the organization's name carried the additional words "for Self-Defense". These were dropped in 1968 when the U.S. government and the FBI declared the group a "major threat to national security", making it into a target for deliberate attacks of all sorts. This was also the year in which Eldridge Cleaver, author and co-founder of the Black Panthers and the movement's spiritual father, participated in the election for the American presidency. Several buttons carrying striking slogans recall his candidacy, whereby these are pinned to a black leather jacket – the informal uniform of the Black Panthers – hung on a coat hook next to Blackman's book. Cleaver himself is portrayed in a large photorealistic graphite drawing, which Pöschl has mounted in a vitrine-like opaque black frame, together with the cover of an "Emmanuelle" film. On the opposing wall one sees the eponymous heroine in the erotic pose of a safari hunter – brandishing a gun and sitting on a peacock chair.

Pöschl's own photo of this recurring prop plays upon the way it mixes erotic and revolutionary settings. By smearing Vaseline on the camera lens he creates a soft-focus effect, while the chair – as on Newton's book cover – is presented on a zebra hide draped across a raft-like construction of boards. The raft, which Newton employed as a symbol of a revolutionary transition to a better future, hangs broken from the ceiling of the exhibition space. It is a wreck, chained and yet preserved, a reminder of failed utopias. Together with the empty space in Pöschl's photo of the peacock chair, whose origins trace back to an Indian throne, it accents the emptiness and arbitrariness arising from the furnishing's appropriation into popular culture.

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Öffnungszeiten:
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