

When Ships Sink They Do It In Water

A few comments on Sara Christensen's (under)water worlds

Everything seems so familiar – but in a disturbing way: the unbeatable pragmatism of the functional form as in the stepped metal tank, reminiscent of a ship's chimneys, the necessary exhaust pipes and the paint so well-established in all things to do with water, the coat so thick and glossy that it warps and blisters: this is tactile realism. This particular combination of fresh gleaming white and yearning blue conjures up sensory memories. As if we were promenading the railings, we almost smell that strange and exhilarating mix of seaweed, sunscreen, salty air, and diesel oil that puts us back to when we were kids on a seaside holiday and conjures up sensations of new possibilities. A quick panoramic glance around the Berlin gallery also offers: a couple of buoys, a bucket of water thrown out, a glass of water half full, colourful napkins on round stretchers looking like plates, and a variation of sailor's knots. Even the gallery's floor boards seem like planks in the context of this exhibition, a perceptive displacement that is fully intended. All objects appear like frozen in mid-air, and are, as such, three-dimensional snap-shot.

„Man and the sea“ is the subject of Sara Christensen's new exhibition: man's fascination with the sea, the imaginative power of familiar nautical things, the longing for departure and change. Being the true comedian she is – one of the very few in the art world, mind you – Christensen presents these motives not pompously, but in a comical, playful, sometimes even consciously silly manner. But that doesn't mean that there isn't a serious note to it all – on the contrary. On second glance, the objects exhibit a bizarre life of their own that seems to belong to the uncanny world of dreams rather than the sphere of austere functionality they come from.

The fountain gurgles away busily, yet it dispenses rum rather than water. As a suggested readymade (it is, in fact welded by the artists), the object alludes to, if you will, Duchamp's 1917 *Fontaine* and all the subsequent artworks on the subject of fountains. The half-full glass will never go dry, the bucket of water will always be caught in mid-action as the liquid is in fact epoxy. Weird are also the plate-like napkins on account of their enormous size. And even if the knots drawn on this comical background are in cartoon style – where, as we all know, anything goes – we still can't help wondering, how they got there in the first place. The buoys would never swim because they are made of rags: old raincoats, jumpers, work clothes and woollen blankets. The materials add new associations to the original maritime dimension, and the title – *Floating Voters* – gives it a tongue-in-cheek political spin.

Nothing is what it seems at first – that is also the message of Christensen's large textiles, entitled *Attached Members*, that follow her previous cycle of work *Fra sans og Samling*. Although the pieces of fabric sewn onto the canvas make them reminiscent of maps, instruments of orientation, their purpose is decidedly to cause constructive confusion. They are collages of anonymous architectural structures and circus motives such as a conjurer (with and without head) or a clown. And as a living epitome of the dream of lands far far away, a budgie, this exotic creature affordable to all and everybody, has lost its way inside the labyrinthine architecture. These tangible jokes, finely-tuned plays on words and well-placed surprises are the elements with which Christensen tests the slippery slopes of reality and celebrates a healthy loss of control.

Gaby Hartel, 2012

(Translation: Uta Kornmeier)