

# Kunsthaus Glarus

## Birgit Megerle – *The Painted Veil*

### May 28 – July 30, 2017

Birgit Megerle (b. 1975 in Geisingen, lives and works in Berlin) focuses on the figure in her paintings. The artist paints her surroundings, well-known personalities, stars, and – with increasing frequency in more recent paintings – anonymous individuals. Precise, detailed, and delicately executed, the portraits are both artificial and distanced. Painterly «reduction» and abstraction determine the implicit views of the private and the public, of medially constructed personalities, and of casual, random poses. In her practice, Birgit Megerle addresses media-specific questions and is concerned with the temporality and historicity of painting. Her motifs are contemporary, current and yet devoid of an obvious time period or identifiable context. The images are subtly voyeuristic, direct our gaze, and yet remain vague, as if a hermetic glass pane or transparent veil separates us from the figures.

With motifs referencing the most varied notions of value, Birgit Megerle explores the portrait as a social currency. For instance *Living Currencies* (2015), a portrait of Christine Lagarde, director of the International Monetary Fund, painted in soft pastel and gray tones. *Gaze I* and *Gaze II*, portraits of Charlotte Rampling, depict the figure of the actress whose capital depends on being able to slip into various (media-exploited) roles. The portraits also reflect on Birgit Megerle's own role and involvement, thus demonstrating the social modes of the artist's existence. This is evident in the self-portrait *Geometric Eye* (2012), which focuses on the artist's gaze. Birgit Megerle also paints artist-colleagues with whom she is in dialogue or references them in an homage-like fashion. For instance, the «ethnopoet» Hubert Fichte who died in the 1980s, in whose literary work the voyeuristic view of other people and their rituals play a central role. Other artists such as Merlin Carpenter or Susanne Winterling from Birgit Megerle's social milieu pose in costumes, or are presented in everyday, intimate poses, similar to the depicted figures she encounters randomly.

Birgit Megerle's paintings, whose characters often peer at the viewer in a theatrical manner or wear costumes, are not just about role-playing as a social currency, but at times they also serve as a stage for the virtual and real appearance of a wide range of actors. *Backdrop for New Theatre 2* originated as a stage set for the musical *Hotel Moon* (2015) for the New Theatre in Berlin, founded by artists Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff, where artists, musicians, actors, and curators developed collaboratively conceived plays, musicals, and performances. *Street Avengers* (2002) depicts a theatrical, mysterious street scene, similar to the subway scene pictured in *Untitled* (2001). *Rhapsody* (2015) presents the French actress Françoise Dorléac during a piano scene in the musical film *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967, directed by Jacques Demy).

Groups of portraits are interrupted by other motifs, such as classical still lifes or coquettish, decorative paintings of flowers. Geometric, abstract paintings, on the other hand, reference the motifs of the American painter Robin Bruch (\*1948 in Ohio, lives and works in New York), whose body of work from the 1970s and 80s only recently surfaced in contemporary contexts. Birgit Megerle destabilizes the customary significance of painterly appropriation in referencing not a noteworthy art historical position but an artist whose work has long been forgotten and whose re-discovery is in the process of being tested out. Accordingly, the logic of the history of painting and its self-references, the relationship to painting's historical modes of expression, is deprived of its self-evident interpretation.

With *The Painted Veil* Birgit Megerle addresses the art-historical formula of painting's mimetic function. This conception of painting, which was already brought up in anecdotes from antiquity, becomes the central point of reference: the veil as well as the curtain serve, in Renaissance paintings in particular, by concealing or partly negating the actual image, the triumph of illusion. Birgit Megerle's paintings play with this aspect of desire to present and to conceal at the same time. The intimated stage-like quality of the compositions is also evident in the installative arrangement of the paintings: on the upper floor, a bar mirror disrupts a series of paintings. In the Seitenlichtsaal, an architectural structure reminiscent of a shelter or a market stall alludes to, among other things, Martin Kippenberger's *Spiderman Studio* (1996). Kippenberger's repeated use of the artist figure as Spiderman casting his webs calls into question, in this staged studio setting, the modern myth of the artist who is both lonely and vulnerable. Birgit Megerle's pavilion of paintings serves as temporary housing for other works. It remains open whether these are to be lauded as wares or to be stored on the smooth, clean surfaces of this architectural structure that implies functionality. *This Was Tomorrow* (2017) is perhaps also an associative model for the

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Kunsthaus. On the one hand, these rooms in the museum were conceived for the preservation of private and official portraits of their founder, Gustav Schneeli (1872–1944), on the other hand, for presenting contemporary paintings, which can be showcased exceptionally well given the building's special play of light. On the outside, the building is surrounded by characteristic natural beauty, impacted visually by the rugged mountain landscape, the lush greenery of the park, the modernist façade; marked by the smalltown life going on around it. The roughly worked color field paintings, situated between scrawlings and abstract landscapes, allude to a similar outside world. On the lower level, individuals from Birgit Megerle's absent paintings are gathered in a vitrine. These figures—people encountered randomly and long-standing acquaintances—circulate in the photographic source material, which is no less staged and abstracted than the paintings in their momentary, frozen positions. In the final room on the lower level, the variété of figures comes to a close via a curtain without any ostensible function.

## Supporting Program and Art Education

Sunday June 25, 2017, 3 pm  
Artist talk with Birgit Megerle

### Public Guided Tours

Thursday June 1, 2017, 6 pm  
with Judith Welter, director

Thursday July 6, 2017, 6 pm  
with Kathrin Bentele, curatorial assistant

### Art Education

Sunday June 11, 2017, 2 – 3:30 pm  
Art Histories for families and adults with Ursula Helg, art educator

Wednesday June 28, 2017, 2 – 4:30 pm  
Art Histories for children with Ursula Helg, art educator

Please visit our website for more information: <http://kunsthausglarus.ch/en/art-education/>