

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Beatrix Ruf, "Alluring Appearance, Complex Core," *Parkett*, April, 2011



BEATRIX RUF

Alluring Appearance, Complex Core

Never have we been so wantonly wooed. No quest for information, be it for business or pleasure, work or leisure, comes without a banner ad, a sideclick, a pop-up, a barrage of brand names and consumer temptations, customization and projected identities. No matter what medium we use, real or virtual, no matter what choice we make, there is an omnipresent and often shoddily designed parade of all things bright and shiny telling us how life could be, how much we want this or that, how readily something is within our grasp, that we can be whoever we want to be, or are told we want to be. Reality and fiction, the unattainable and the obtainable, before and after, past and future, inadequacy and perfection all seem to fuse in collages of text and image, forcibly uniting the incompatible, with great purpose, but with no discernible taste or style.

Kerstin Brätsch deploys a similarly motley mix of media and references in her art. Exploiting the status of the visual image as a marketable commodity, and using a process of continuous variation, the allure of her large-scale art banners is constantly reactivated. These extraordinarily large paper paintings (most of

them 300 x 200 cm) and extra-long sheets of painted mylar are either installed on the floor of the gallery, on strident Plexiglas panels, anchored to the wall like advertising banners, mounted with super-strong magnets on the glass panes of bona-fide "art frames," or draped like swathes of fabric over a variety of objects in the gallery space.

Kerstin Brätsch's works draw upon the creativity of a media-driven collectivity that accepts, as given, the simultaneity of the original with the inevitable parallel existence of reproductions and the media dissemination of images, and they reveal this state of reality to us both critically and tangibly. In her 103-point *Psychischer Atlas* (Psychic Atlas), the artist lists Point 22 as "Painting is performative realism. (I declare that I doubt)," Point 30 as "A theatre-requisite room and a V.I.P. Lounge at the same time," Point 58 as "Thought Forms/Emma Kunz," and Point 59 as "Picabia."

Brätsch's paintings are teeming with histories, stories and originals: Romanticism, Early Modernism, German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and even Francis Picabia all play a role, as does the painting of the 1950s, and the 1980s in general, from Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, and Albert

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Kerstin Brätsch

*DAS INSTITUT, "Greater New York," exhibition view PS 1, New York, 2010 / Ausstellungsansicht.
(PHOTO: LUKAS KNIPSCHER)*



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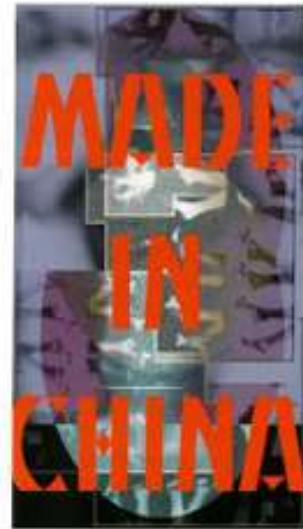
Kerstin Brätsch



KERSTIN BRÄTSCH für DAS INSTITUT, MY PENIS HAS THE SHAPE OF MY HEART ON THE PILLOWS, 2009, painting and poster, exhibition view "Bayrischschöner," Rabier Heerling Paris / MEIN PENIS HAT DIE FORM MEINES HERZENS AUF DEM KISSEN, Gemälde und Plakat, Ausstellungswunsch.



DAS INSTITUT, WHO I REALLY AM, 2009, title poster, digital print on archival paper, 39 1/2 x 27 1/2" / WER ICH WIRKLICH BIN, Titelplakat, Digitaldruck auf Archivpapier, 100 cm x 70 cm.



DAS INSTITUT, MADE IN CHINA, 2009, title poster, digital print on archival paper, 39 1/2 x 27 1/2" / Titelplakat, Digitaldruck auf Archivpapier, 100 cm x 70 cm.

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Kerstin Brätsch



DAS INSTITUT, EAT AND DRINK VARIABLE FROM
DI WHY RELAX!, 2009, Series Spa en va Series,
silkscreen on nylon, each 39 1/2" x 51 1/2" /
ISS UND TRINK VARIABLE VON DI WARUM ENTSPANNUNG!,
Siebdruck auf Mylarfolie, je 100 x 130cm.



DAS INSTITUT, QUIET PLEASE VARIABLE FROM
DI WHY RELAX!, 2009, Series Spa en va Series,
silkscreen on nylon, each 39 1/2" x 51 1/2" /
RUHE BITTE VARIABLE VON DI WARUM ENTSPANNUNG!,
Siebdruck auf Mylarfolie, je 100 x 130cm.

Oehlen to the occult, the esoteric, and consumer trash. The work of her own contemporaries, such as Josh Smith and Seth Price, whose paintings and media-based works address issues relating to the original, the hand of the artist, media distribution, and the way these affect the production of meaning, are also referenced—and, needless to say, the aesthetics of advertising runs like a red thread throughout, a leitmotif permeating her installations reflecting on aspects of display and presentation.

Caterina Riva and Joshua Simon, in their introduction to the dialogue “The Language of Things” at the Showroom, London, in December 2010, state:

When Karl Marx described commodity fetishism in Capital (1867), he mentioned that beyond its exchange and use values, the commodity has a third implied quality, or as he put it: “A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.” Since the past 150 years the commodity has become the historical subject in contemporary culture. Almost every object enters the world today as

a commodity and as such it feels most at home in this world (think of IKEA ...). Through various strategies of composition, appropriation and re-contextualization of different commodities, artists try to make and understand artworks today. From an assemblage of consumer products to an abstract painting, one could argue that some commodities are art objects, but all art objects are commodities. The commodity not only precedes the commodification of artworks in the art market, but it precedes the artwork itself. It is the material that is in all materials. It is the basic technique of every technique, the fundamental medium of all mediums.¹¹

Metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties also permeate the work of Kerstin Brätsch. The presentation and distribution of her works are so obviously and explicitly informed by the spirit of commodification that they provide test cases for the assumptions, expectations, possibilities, and speculation relating to the expanded values of art.

In 2007, true to form, she and Adele Röder founded the suitably ostentatiously named company DAS INSTITUT as an import/export agency serving to promote the visual motifs of both artists in an inex-

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tricable to and fro of original and variation, individualization and multiplication, and authentication and analysis of identity.

Brätsch and Röder produce both individual and collaborative works with, for, and through DAS INSTITUT. Within DAS INSTITUT, their images undergo multiple variations of appearance and form, becoming textile patterns, knitwear, fashion collections, slide shows, pictograms, stage sets, index lists, functional everyday objects, stickers and transfers, books, and art exhibitions (I)—and indeed, just about anything else that might lend itself to distribution. The ghosts and parasites of art appear in every conceivable form, all duly certified, as it were, by a brand name. The grand title buffers the ponderables of individual subjective statements, standing as it does for all the research and educational institutes that

*DAS INSTITUT, "Non-Sale Show, Non-Group Show,"
Swiss Space via, Installation view / Installationsansicht,
Kunsthalle Zürich, 2009.
(PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)*



Kerstin Brätsch

*KERSTIN BRÄTSCH for DAS INSTITUT, UNTITLED, 2010,
spraypaint, New York Times advertisements, Plexiglas, metal
clamps, each 19 1/2 x 27 1/2", exhibition view "Blow Blow!"
Paris Saint Léger / OHNE TITEL., Sprühfarbe, New York Times
Erklären, Plexiglas, Metallklammern, je 50 x 70 cm,
Ausstellungsansicht. (PHOTO: PASC SAINT LÉGER)*



populate the world of knowledge and commodities. At the same time, it is a strategic move and a form of insurance that is as polemical and critical as it is witty.

HEY DU KUNST, HEY KERSTIN BRÄTSCH—the titles of the works and what the artist expresses in them highlight, with grandiloquent ambiguity, the deliberate allure of the works and their oblique yet pertinent allusion to questions of meaning: UNISEX SERIES; PSYCHICS SERIES; ÄTSCH BRÄTSCH; EYE GIVES YOU A DEAL; MADE IN CHINA; WER ICH WIRKLICH BIN, JA HELLO, HELLO, YES HELLO; DR. DEBRO; GIB MIR KRAFT; ARE YOU GAME?; FÜRST FÜRST SERIES; BUY-BRÄTSCHWÖRST; DI WHY RELAX! SWISS SPA CAVA SERIES; GENRES, PERHAPS, OR TACTICS, MAYBE?; STARS AND STRIPES SERIES; LA TECHNIQUE DE BRÄTSCH SERIES; BROADWAYBRÄTSCH/CORPORATE ABSTRACTION (II); KERSTIN KOPY KOMMERZIAL; WHO'S KERSTIN BRÄTSCH?; WHEN YOU SEE ME AGAIN IT WON'T BE ME ... Pompous questioning of identity, pompous expectations of art, pompously user-friendly productions. (III)

In the oeuvre of Kerstin Brätsch and DAS INSTITUT the outward appearance of the artwork is invariably only one of many possibilities; its identity is one of many possible identities and even the promise of authenticity embodied in the hand-painted original by an artist as technically skilled as Kerstin Brätsch can invoke and produce many "ghosts."

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Kerstin Brätsch

In 2009, Brätsch mounted two simultaneous exhibitions featuring originals and their ghosts. All the works in her "BUYBRÄTSCHWÖRST" exhibition at the Balice Hertling gallery in Paris were presented in her "BUYBRÄTSCHWÖRSTGHOSTS" show at the Hermes und der Pfau exhibition space in Stuttgart in the form of variations, mutations, and transpositions. Ghosts were also produced by DAS INSTITUT: the color brochures documenting Kerstin Brätsch's exhibition at Balice Hertling in Paris were available in Stuttgart in the form of black-and-white copies.

With DAS INSTITUT, Kerstin Brätsch and Adele Röder trawl through hackneyed areas of imagination and expectation to dredge up potentially new and highly-charged forms. They do not do so in the sense of expanding artistic activities and formulae from the world of art into the world of design and use, the way artists did in the 90s, by creating or addressing, for instance, the conditions by which the production and meaning of art are expanded. Instead, they focus on the problems of the authentication of art in a thoroughly commodified world, on possible instruments of abstraction, and also on what art, fashion, and design are capable of achieving within the world of products in terms of creating models, spreading information, and conveying meaning. For the purposes of DAS INSTITUT, they describe this approach as design, advertising, and distribution.

I: In two exhibitions—"Thus! Unit # 1-3" at the New Jersey gallery in Basel and "Thus! Unit # 4" in the Greater New York exhibition at MoMA PS1 in New York (both 2010)—the artists play through the entire repertoire of their collaborative effort: originals by Kerstin Brätsch, computer-digitalized by Röder, appear in variations painted by Brätsch as "authentic" paper paintings on the wall, while motifs by Adele Röder are presented as textile prints on the floor, referencing the basic ingredients (such as wooden frames and glass) that are involved in the presentation of paintings, or taking the form of fabrics, clothing, or everyday objects. Interwoven motifs by both artists are hung from rails as draped prints on advertising banners, along with textile prints by Röder and hand-painted mylar ghosts of works by Brätsch. For the exhibitions, the two artists also developed

an advertising campaign in which they can both be seen in front of their own works, holding up a sign on which the company initials DI (DAS INSTITUT) can be read as ID, in reference to identity.

II: In "Broadwaybrätsch/Corporate Abstraction," created for DAS INSTITUT and shown at Art Basel's Art Statements (2010), Brätsch used marketing models and fashion elements to systematically break down the presentational modes of art into their component parts. Her presentation consisted of a large group of nine paper paintings stacked in alternating order so that three different pictures were visible at any one time, and affixed to the front of the glass in solid wooden frames by her hallmark magnets. The paintings included motifs from several of Brätsch's earlier works, in a grandiose amalgam that formed a remix of her own oeuvre and evoked abstract works from art history. By changing the order of the paintings on a daily basis, she created an expanded form of exhibition involving a constant remix of images. Cf. Point 22: "Painting is performative realism (I declare that I doubt)." DAS INSTITUT had produced advertising posters featuring a mix of motifs by both artists and textile prints for shirts worn by the gallery staff. Together with the constantly changing images, these wall posters and shirts transformed the overall installation into an accelerated circus of conceptual deflation: What is art? Who markets it? Who performs it? Where is the original? Who is Kerstin Brätsch?

III: In their latest group of works, the two artists use themselves as material to create what might be described as a photographic "portrait." Using painting, fashion accessories, prints, fabrics, and other productions by DAS INSTITUT, as well as works by both artists, they create a graphic and all-inclusive image of the individual as product.

(Translation: Inghel Flett)

1) "The Language of Things" in The Showroom, 4 December 2010, Conversation with Luigi Fassi, Stefano Harney, Julia Moritz, Andrea Phillips, and Joshua Simon. <http://www.theshowroom.org/programme.html?id=101,355>

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Kerstin Brätzek

KERSTIN BRÄTZEK: *Im Haus im Norden, My Love, an Frau, com wild, mähw, vor, how, to, chow, the, joff*
Over Grass on the Field, 2009, Foto, Photo, Action, auf, ein, joppe, 110 x 72,7 / Mein, Leben, an, Frau, auch, wird
Das, Leben, im, Haus, auf, dem, Feld, Original, Blauen, Grau, zu, Kauen, ist, 60, mal, Papier, 279,4 x 182,9 cm



MASSIMILIANO GIONI

Notes on Abstraction

For Kerstin Brätsch, painting is merely one tile in a mosaic of languages that range from drawing to performance, sculpture to design, by way of theater and fashion. Brätsch sees a painted work as a single link in a system of production and distribution. Perhaps it is the hidden influence of Franz West and his *Passstücke*—sculptures that can be used as strange theatrical props—or a return to the experimental fluidity of the 1960s, in the footsteps of Robert Rauschenberg, painter, dancer, and choreographer; unquestionably, Brätsch thinks of her work as an exercise in constant lateral shifts through which a painting can become a book, a sculpture, the set for a performance, or even turn into a phantom image of itself. And the artist's identity seems to follow a similar path, moving freely from the personal to the collective, from Kerstin Brätsch to DAS INSTITUT.

There is the echo of a great deal of twentieth-century abstract painting in Brätsch's work, and she knows how to digest entire stylistic vocabularies with the same ease, processing them into a unique mixture. There is no referentialism or historical obsession in her work; if anything, there is a pride in seeming absolutely contemporary and of the moment. With the awareness, however, that the era we live in is also based on the synchronicity and permeability of languages, as if every style were always on hand, within reach, but never completely assimilable.

MASSIMILIANO GIONI is Associate Director at the New Museum in New York and Artistic Director of the Trussardi Foundation in Milan. He recently curated *10,000 Lives*, the 8th Gwangju Biennale, where Kerstin Brätsch presented a selection of her paintings.

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Kerstin Brätsch

Painting in the age of Wikipedia: a surfeit of information, maximum superficiality, minimum knowledge—history as assemblage.

Among the artists whose traces and memories are to be found in the works of Kerstin Brätsch, one could list, almost at random: René Daniels, Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz, František Kupka, Sonia Delaunay, Bridget Riley, Rudolf Steiner. And this legacy is also encrusted with the enticements of much more prosaic visual languages: old advertisements, worn photocopies, decorative motifs, computer graphics, patterns from cheap fabric, photographs from mail-order catalogues.

Kerstin Brätsch's painting seems to strive for a precarious balance between diverging impulses and attitudes. It is no coincidence that many of her paintings and drawings have an irresolute way of occupying space: hung from magnets, stretched out like bedsheets in the wind, suspended on wooden frames, or left on the ground like clothes torn off in the heat of an amorous encounter. Brätsch's painting is environmental and spatial, but often takes a marginal position within the exhibition space, off to the side, as if it were somewhat insecure: her painting is first and foremost an attitude, not a style, a way of inhabiting space.

When forms become attitudes.

Brätsch's objects and artworks often trigger actions or generate other objects and products, as in a chain reaction.

Perhaps Brätsch's art is interested not so much in abstraction as in a form of obstruction, concealment, and dissimulation. She seems stubbornly determined not to be just a painter, even though painting is her vocation. In all of her work, one can sense an effort to escape from the narrow confines of painting, to instead create a form of art that cannot be immediately traced to a single genre.

In this centrifugal movement, outside the limits of painting, Brätsch's work is connected to an entire tradition of minor and decorative arts. Especially in the series of works created under the pseudonym DAS INSTITUT—a sort of fictional collective made up of Kerstin Brätsch and Adele Röder—one can feel the echo of Bauhaus, and even before that, of the Arts & Crafts Movement, but somehow debased and corroded by a new sense of urgency and immediacy, even by a certain cheapness that is very much of our present time.

DAS INSTITUT is Bauhaus by way of the sweatshops of the Far East.

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Kerstin Brätsch



Kerstin Brätsch



KERSTIN BRÄTSCH, paintings from *Psychic Series*, thesis show, 2007, and *BOOK SHELVING UNTIL*, selfmade books and booklets from unlimited edition / Gemälde aus der *Psychic Series*, Diplomausstellung und *BÜCHERREGAL EINHEIT*, selbstgemachte Bücher und Buchsäure aus unlimitierter Edition.

(ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BALICE BERTLING, PARIS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED)

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Kerstin Brätsch

DAS INSTITUT is Bauhaus meets disco design.

This tendency to mix the loftiest languages with the most hackneyed styles crops up in many of Brätsch's paintings. In the *Psychic Series*, for instance, she combines theosophy with spirituality straight out of a self-help manual. Abstract painting as a vehicle towards the absolute is one of the most burdensome legacies of the century just behind us. In the large works on paper of the *Psychic Series*, Brätsch seems to be looking for a way to deal with the sublime without falling into the snare of kitsch. The paintings in the *Psychic Series* are not aura portraits or the projections of some kind of obscure force; rather, they are an attempt to open up a pictorial space in which the absolutist urges of visionary painting can coexist with much lighter, more contemporary forms of notation. Strange, vaguely larval forms loom out of these large drawings: here and there, once can glimpse the oval of a face, the shape of a head. Elsewhere one finds large, wide-open, oddly animal eyes. These are paintings that swarm with protocellular life, or whose planes of color ripple like television static. The faces that sometimes float up to the surface have the gaseous substance of a revelation. These are contemporary icons—icons in the sense of religious paintings and of computer graphics. The sublime is now.

Many of Kerstin Brätsch's paintings live a double life. They exist as themselves and as ghosts of their former being. Painted on sheets of mylar and plastic, the works that Brätsch calls "ghosts" are copies of pieces the artist has painted before: the same motifs, shapes and colors that she used in her works on paper are repeated on transparent backgrounds. This repetition and dematerialization of painting is a process that demystifies and critiques Brätsch's work from the inside, as if through these transparent copies, the artist wanted to strip her previous paintings of all weight, rendering them lighter, volatile. Moreover, Brätsch's phantom copies are not faithful reproductions of the originals, but rather variations on a theme. Actually, one could say that all of Brätsch's work rests on the very negation of any difference between original and copy. All of her paintings are originals and all are copies, to the point that many of Brätsch's abstractions actually derive from patterns drawn on the computer by Adele Röder: in other words, her abstract paintings are reproductions of computer-generated graphic motifs that Brätsch diligently enlarges and reproduces on paper. Through these repetitions and endless translations across media, Brätsch—like many artists of her generation—seems to take painting to a new level of inflation, as though it were to compete with the industry of digital imaging.

In the Brätsch system, every object is interchangeable, and the borders between painting, design, sculpture are equally fluid, to the extent that for some paintings, Brätsch and DAS INSTITUT have even come up with a series of posters and commercials to promote the works as if they were commodities or design products.

Kerstin Brätsch's goal is probably to no longer be considered a painter, to finally be seen as the owner of a conceptual import/export agency, a trader in the market of pure information, an aesthete of communication.

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Kerstin Brütch



KERSTIN BRÜTCH, *PSYCHIC STATES, SELF-PORTRAIT*, 2007, acrylic on paper, 85 x 105 cm.
MUSEUM FÜR MODERNE KUNST, 2017, 21.3.17, 21.3.17
PROFILGALERIE FÜR KONTEMPORÄRE KUNST, 17