ALMINE RECH

Michaela Meise
Michael

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"hello my dears. i am glad to finally get to know you personally. but there's just one thing bothering me about you. it's always the someone else's fault. you need to be more careful next time if you fall down the stairs or get run over or if you lose your job."

Elfriede Jelinek: *Michael* (son of the protagonist Inge Meise, author's note), *Ein Jugendbuch über die Infantilgesellschaft*, Hamburg 1972

The title MICHAEL of Michaela Meise's first individual exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in Brussels is also the motif of a colorful and childlike relief. The word, composed of Barbapapa letters, was therefor cast-in paint.

What is MICHAEL up to here? The alter ego of female artist Michaela. As a man? The A is missing. Let us look for the A and figure out what this empty space is all about!

Das schwache Haus [The Flimsy House] (2007) consists of two large plywood sheets leaning against each other and looks like an A, but without the cross bar. MichaelA... The similarity in shape of this sculpture to letters or characters also makes the other sculptures seem rather surreal and symbolic to me, in spite of the extreme simplicity in their construction. Thus *Umgedrehte Satztische* [Upside-down End Tables] (2007) is an object that, if viewed from a different perspective, would look like a bunch of beetles on their backs helplessly waving their legs. The third sculpture in the exhibit, *Trans Column* (2009), is the only one that isn't conceived in black but in color. Rods project from a round baseplate into the air, higher than a person's head. Almost like an upside-down barstool. At any rate like an anchorless, upside-down column.

Because of the materials and designs she uses, many fancy that they see a relationship between Michaela Meise's sculptures and early minimalism. But I fail to see this interpretation. One cannot fail to see, however, that these sculptures exhibit hardly any reference points. Just like a foreign alphabet. But also like the stage setting for a mental state.

The assembly esthetics likewise do not lend themselves to any particular art history classification. Instead the concept here seems to be something conceived by an art amateur and beyond any other esthetic analysis. This trend can be discerned in her earlier exhibitions and sculptures as well, such as *Liegende* [Recliners] (2007), *Zunge* [Tongue] (2007), *Tür auf Tür zu* [Door open, door shut] (2007), etc. It is the movement, the communicative expression of the sculptures amongst each other, and the apparently volatile, fragile condition that makes me think of a game more than anything else. A play on poses, transpositions, materials, and authorship. The omission of the A is also a part thereof, and is a play on identities. By adding an A, in German man frequently becomes woman (and I'm not sure myself what I'm to make of that!). By ignoring the letter A, the artist counteracts the female artist alter ego.

This is not the first time that Michaela Meise made the concept of professional roles the subject of her artistic expression. Among other things, there are photos of her as a (fictitious) young mother, photos of the (fictitious) artist Meise in her studio, and recurring videos and performance photos in which she is acting as an artist, muse, or dancer, or adopting poses of other people.

In this respect the A isn’t missing. It is like a misplaced key. Arthur Rimbaud’s idea of "I is another person" applies here, both to the artist herself and to her sculptures.

Kirsa Geiser