

Sylvie Fleury

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Until now Sylvie Fleury's spaceships, lipstick-coloured or covered in fluffy fake fur, have been considered chic yet mundane messengers from the world of women's accessories: a universe where disco balls revolve in place of planets. The promise of salvation offered by the polished chrome surfaces of cast bronze designer ankle boots seemed ultimately of a secular nature and coined solely for the desires of spoilt fashion victims: redemption through consumption of exclusive luxury items. Fleury's work has also been dismissed as the superficial self-representation of a glamour-girl who restages her shopping moods under the auspices of the art world.

With this big solo exhibition, however, Fleury has stepped up a gear: the high heels have been visited by higher beings. The title of the show is part of the programme: inspired by the reportedly magical number '49000', 'spirit and matter should unite in the sign of the aura'. 'The Inner Consciousness that Shines Forth is the Very Non-Dual Bliss, and the Non-Dual Bliss is the Very Inner Consciousness', pledged the gigantic mural of a stylized corona on the back wall of the main hall, which was repeated in some of the side cabinets as a neon coloured Op-art-wallpaper-mantra. Instead of beatific smiling Bodhisattvas, Fleury's monstrously inflated Dog Toys (2000) crouched like tin gods of the Pokémon generation. With the walls covered in pastel coloured bird's-eye views, the rooms became chapels for earlier works such as Gucci Shoes (1998), the neon claims of trademark slogans (Be Amazing, 1999) or the chrome-plated motor-blocks of American luxury cars (283 Chevy, 400 Pontiac, 1999).

You could take a seat in 8 (2000) - a walk-in golden ball - and meditatively sink into a glittering galaxy of Swarovski stones, in whose orbits gilded supermarket trolleys turned like satellites. The shopping queen takes off and becomes a 'Queen of Outer Space', her appearance already announced by the soundtrack of the sci-fi film of the same name, audible in the golden space capsule.

Good heavens! Fleury esoteric? Now, in place of nail varnish, rainbow-coloured essences for the determination of the psychic energies of the astral body were assembled in a row of wall racks (Aura Soma, 2001). In one cabinet an aura video station was set up in which visitors could test their spiritual social skills, illuminated by a gigantic crystal excrescence. One would have almost liked to think that things have become too serious with the Aura - but only 'almost'.

As opposed to Mariko Mori, who performs at the centre of her cosmos without the slightest irony, Fleury's pendulum swings in an arc that can be understood as a conceptual closing of the circle. It leads back to those earlier works with which the artist not only addressed the blueprints of fashion but also those of art. The gauche 'Pucci-Paintings' (1992) reflected back into the art world a fabric design that had been appropriated from early Modernist abstraction, and thus showed not only the failure of the 'great Utopias' but also the failure of the great gestures of the avant-garde masters, the self-styled heralds of a new era, whose patterns - half a century later - made their way onto silk scarves, mini-skirts, even Ikea carpets and tins of hairspray. It is hardly by chance that the 'Pucci-Paintings' were also integrated in the cosmos of '49000', as well as Fleury's variations on the space conquest fantasies of Lucio Fontana, a Concetto Spaziale (1993) coolly punched into denim.

Previously critics berated the artist because her work, though full of relish, appropriated Modernism just as superficially as fashion did. Today, Fleury's excursion into the esoteric cosmos makes some suspect that it's just a flight from the consumer world, which the shopping queen has tired of celebrating. All art craves eternity? Who would know better than Fleury that 'Eternity' has been a registered trademark for a while now - one that may linger longer in the memory than the perfume of the same name remains on the skin.

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