

Vincent Vulmsma
ARS NOVA E5305-B

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Creating value with folds

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No, concept has never really meant horse. Or so Daniel Buren once established. Since it sounds just as catchy as it does absurd, and because such an axiom can hardly be contradicted, the Vienna Generali Foundation (Die Wiener Generali Foundation) borrowed the saying as the name for an exhibition - in fact in 2006 for a show presenting an overview of conceptual art since the 1960s. Incidentally, with his statement Buren captured a profound truth. Conceptual art is either so transparent that you can relate the work to the idea behind it intuitively, or all it does is tell you about a horse. Often enough, the concept has to serve as a magical formula for ascribing significance in the art business. The adjective conceptual is a universal tool for attributing relevance to an artistic work. Every gesture becomes a grandiose one, every idea is given importance - if the work is not just a work, but rather 'conceptual art'. In the worst-case scenario, concept means that someone, somewhere, at some time, *must* have thought something. You must only summon up the necessary reverence for it.

On close inspection, the pictures which Dutchman Vincent Vulmsma (born in 1982) is currently exhibiting as part of a solo show at Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender do not appear to be particularly conceptual. On the contrary. Only at first, cursory glance does this presentation appear to be challenging. Because Vulmsma has restricted himself with his cryptically entitled "ARS NOVA E5305-B" series of pictures to a single standard portrait format. Because we are talking here about eight pictures which practically appear to be monochrome, gleaming in black, on whose thin plastic surface we can make out vague signs of painting. The relaxed hanging of the works, which invokes a setting that focuses just as much on the individual images as it does on some chic balanced overall impression immediately prompts you to look closer. These pictures whisk us away into a realm of the solemn and sublime. Suddenly, these gleaming, reflective surfaces seem to distinctly reflect fabric drapery, elegant folds, stage curtains or black ribbons, perhaps even produced using an air-brush or to give us a photo realist result. At the same time, these hung images seem so opaque, so impenetrable, so mysterious in the way their surface allure draws us in - albeit a surface simply constructed using cheap cling film. How they begin to fascinate us despite their immense simplicity. Because we have long since picked up the scent. Take it as given that these pictures, each of which bears its own identification number, are actually quite straightforward, quite simply crafted. The pieces of foil crimp on the sides of the stretcher frame, creating unattractive folds, and thus disturbing the overall impression of exaltation. Surely the cheapness and vulgarity of the materials used, together with traces of their production contradicts their magnetic pull. Why, indeed, should we be captivated by looking at cling film?

The more we learn about the way in which these pictures were produced, the more we find ourselves asking whether the style and manner of their production was not chosen deliberately in order to trigger this spectacular effect. "ARS NOVA E5305-B" is the commercial name of the ready-framed canvasses that Vincent Vulmsma uses for what is in fact a profoundly conceptual method of producing images. And the seductive plastic surface is nothing more than the remaining foil packaging in which the canvases were delivered. Vulmsma takes these off, sprays them black with spray paint, and then re-works the folds and shriveled areas, caused by a chemical reaction between the paint and the foil, in white. Mounted anew, the packaging becomes a picture. And what we once perceived as drapes and folds transpires to be nothing more than a carefully staged coincidence.

Vulmsma's exhibition is as suspended between the traditional medium of painting and the conceptual tradition of the ready-made as it is between the poles of conceptual analysis of the image or the creative production process, on the one hand, and the suggestive appearance of the aesthetically spectacular, on the other. Yet Vulmsma's approach is not a matter of an ideology of the conceptual, but rather demonstrably handcraft - a strategy of simultaneous visual construction and deconstruction which can be identified in the work. In Vulmsma's work it is clear that "concept" can not only be viewed as a subjective assertion of the production of artistic added value, but rather that by using a particular artistic form one can in fact put an idea to the test.

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