

Vincent Vulmsa/ 12/02 2011 - 01/28 2012/ Opening on Friday, 12/02 2011/ 19.00 - 21.30 pm

In his second solo show at Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender, Dutch artist Vincent Vulmsa further explores a theme central to his body of work: the ambivalent status of artifacts in relation to the production of meaning and as carriers of information, their subjection to authorship and the subsequent influence this has on their value in the art market. In a number of his recent exhibitions, Vulmsa highlights aspects like labor, economic conditions of production, presentation and distribution in the art world while linking these processes to reception and appropriation of traded artisanal goods from overseas—mainly from former colonies—in the West. Taken out of their contexts and exhibited in ethnographic collections in Europe and the United States, these artifacts left their mark on the canons of modernist art and design.

Vulmsa deliberately meanders between fine definitions of what's classified as commodity, art or ethnographic objects. His interests are directed toward the effects of shifting cultural objects across different social and historical contexts, investigating the role that artists and other art world specialists have in these processes of value-making. Using various strategies of presentation and appropriation, and re-purposing existing cultural resources, Vulmsa funnels the abundant connections existing between new cultural production and processes of value accumulation into his work. He employs methods of abstraction to transport the accumulated value between different contexts and media, thus reflecting processes of de-territorialization characteristic to an era dominated by the logic of financial capitalism. Although based on extensive research, Vulmsa's work does not remain within the genre of research art; the objects and installations he creates are imbued with the themes of his inquiries, and become participants in the art market cycle in their own right.

For his series of Jacquard woven textile works, Vulmsa used the Photographic Corpus of African Negro Art by Walker Evans as a point of departure. The photographic corpus is the official documentation of the exhibition "African Negro Art" that was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1935. Evans made hundreds of images documenting nearly all items exhibited in the show. A selection of the photographs was collected into a portfolio of images that was sent out across the country as a travelling exhibition. Vulmsa used low-resolution digital copies of the images culled from the digital archive at the MET. He chose images of 19th century textiles made by the Kuba peoples of Central Africa, who used the textiles as currency. The textile panels show various examples of elaborate Kuba patterns signifying status, value, tribal belonging and more.

The photographs have been used as a source for three subsequent series. The first two series, previously exhibited together under the title Foreign Exchange, comprise a four-part wall piece based on one photograph showing a detail of one specific textile panel, and a five-part floor piece based on five different photographs. The floor pieces are folded to the size of the original Kuba textiles and displayed in serial fashion. The second series, WE455, comprises 13 individual works all taking their cue from one single photo (number 455 in the corpus) of a square textile panel. The digital image of the square panel has been reworked through repeated procedures of rotation (as the photographs do not necessarily represent the correct orientation of the textiles), cropping and scaling on the computer. Vulmsa thus systematically singled out fragments, gradually zooming in from the overall pattern to single motifs on the Kuba textile.

The standard weave fills, each replacing one of the 13 grey scales in the photographic image, were manipulated in the process of translating the digital data into Jacquard designs; the motifs of the weaves have been enlarged to correspond to the 4 different rates of scaling of the photographic details. As a result, the weave structure is widening and further exposing itself with every step of fragmentation of the image. The final size of the works has been determined according to the maximum width of the Jacquard loom, in this case 170 cm in width and height.

The process of abstraction Vulmsa used to produce both series could be seen as a contemporary continuation of the theme of Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, extended into the age of Digitalization. The shift in perception Benjamin discusses in the wake of modernity has shifted yet again in the age of Google Art Project and worldwide access to museums' digitalized collections. Vulmsa's works are based on the photographs of the Kuba textiles, on Walker Evans mechanical reproductions, which employ a certain aesthetic and imply specific authorship. Not to mention the information they carry about the technological means of their time—black and white photography—which leaves out the colors of the textiles.

If Benjamin considers the effects of modernity on human perception in general and on the work of art in particular, the textiles in this show are artifacts stipulated in the Information Age. The aforementioned digital manipulations to the patterns of the Kuba textiles, but also the actual manufacturing process used for transferring the digital data back into an "analog" object, a work of art imbued with "aura", are entirely computer based.

Furthermore, each crossing on the weave corresponds to one pixel on the digital image. The black and white yarns thus correlate to the binary idea of image pixels and of computer language in general. Interestingly, the correlation between the Jacquard loom and digitalization dates back to the early 19th century: invented by Joseph Marie Jacquard, the Jacquard loom was the first machine to use punched cards. These punched cards controlled the weaving, enabling an ordinary workman to produce the most intricate patterns in a style previously accomplished only with patience, skill, and hard labor. The Jacquard loom is therefore considered the forerunner of the computer, and the theme central to Vulmsa's work of exploring relations between labor, contexts of production, authorship and value inheres in the textiles.

Text: Hili Perlson