

Sabine Reitmaier

Not comme les autres

November 30 2012 - February 2, 2013

Opening on Friday, November 30, 2012
7 pm - 9.30 pm

For the past ten years, Sabine Reitmaier has photographed the covers of *Psychologie Heute*, a German special-interest magazine that addresses mental health issues from burn-out to relationship problems. The covers generally portray a single female model, shot in colour against a monochromatic background, along with the magazine's title and its signature graphics and issue-specific topics. The magazine's layout is seemingly balanced in its visual relationship between image and text: its clean design is stark and highly legible with images shot in medium close-up and generally cropped, wherein face and hand gestures become the focus, the pictorial event. Unlike style or gossip magazines, the lure of the cover page invites a one-to-one identification, not as an aspiration towards fame or luxury, but by individualising affect, portraying feelings and emotions as both empirical and tractable, signs and symptoms as both limpid and manageable.

Upon closer inspection, however, Reitmaier's cover images convey something unexpected, a disconnect through their mannered staging: the models' expressions and poses are simplified and condensed to the point parody, like a *photo-roman* or film still: over-determined, they are silent yet visually communicative. The images suggest a fictional narrative moment in time, the capture of an incident or happening with a past and a potential future, a kind of genre or stock image but without captions to identify the scene. In this exhibition the hand-painted monochrome backgrounds and their associative colour 'emotions' (for example, red for anger, blue for sadness) only underline the lack of contextual information conferring all interest upon affect.

To perform affect as a communicative skill signals another aspect of the Reitmaier's work - the work of labour itself. Where does 'the work' of the exhibition happen and how does its enfolding make labour speak its forms, its processes, its production of subjectivity? By exhibiting her commercial work as her art work and by picking apart those very images, Reitmaier seeks to disable such axioms as art/non-art, commercial/fine art, high/low and so on but nonetheless leaves traces of these binarisms because they in fact furnish what the elements of work, or rather, being a worker means today. In an era of neoliberal 'realism', an anthropological understanding of the subject envisions the world through the marketplace where competition is naturalized to the extent that we are all workers and entrepreneurs of ourselves - a totalizing view of economic social reality, human nature and rationality. This shift in ideology and its forms is foremost a shift of the production of subjectivity and truth, the all-encompassing economic calculus behind every aspect of human activity. Reitmaier's exhibition not only articulates a mode of production, of how labour functions, where affect, communication and social knowledge - allegorised in the magazine covers and in their decontextualisation - are tools of survival, but also a mode of subjection, the way 'economic being' is naturalised in the role of the artist/worker herself.

Text: David Bussel