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Raphaela Simon: Erdbeeren



Top left: *Jackett mit Futter* ('Jacket with Lining'), 2019, oil on linen, 1.75 x 2.m. Top right: *11 Uhr* ('11 o'clock'), 2019, oil on linen, 2 x 1.6m.

In 2016, the young German painter Raphaela Simon (b.1986) decided she needed to break free of the artistic trap she had created for herself. Since graduating from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where she had been taught by Peter Doig, she had been steadily gaining a reputation for tightly ordered abstract paintings in stripes, checks and circles that were beautiful in scale, simplicity and directness. They echoed a tradition of cool Minimalist art that dated back to the mid-20th century, with elements of Bridget Riley, Sol Le Witt and Philip Guston, but in an icy palette that recalled Disney's *Frozen*. Speaking from her Berlin studio on the eve of her first solo exhibition in London, Simon says: 'I suddenly wanted to be an amateur again, and make mistakes.'

The artist began to sew, something she admits she is not very good at - creating life-sized forms in fabric and wire reminiscent of Claes Oldenburg's floppy sculptures of the 1960s. The first stitched artworks she considered exhibiting were two tables for a show in Los Angeles, *Tischlein deck dich* ('The Wishing Table'), referencing a Grimm fairytale in which objects come to life. 'In the end, I exchanged them for abstract paintings that I laid on the ground,' she says, but the idea remained and, in 2017, Simon succeeded in combining the contradictions in her practice into one immaculate exhibition (...) at TRAMPS's New York space. The show was witty, and colourful.

Having escaped the confines of her practice, she now turned back to painting, swapping the rigour and order of abstraction for Pop art's chaos of consumption. For the London exhibition, she has expanded her palette and created figurative works of everyday objects against black backgrounds. Like her sculptures, the pictures have a beguiling, naïve quality, evocative of children's illustrators such as Dick Bruna or David McKee - particularly in the pink marshmellowy folds of *Daunenjacke* ('Puffer Jacket').

Titled *Erdbeeren* ('Strawberries') - Simon often chooses one-word names - the show features images of things she would like to own, including Mr Magoo-like spectacles with electric blue lenses, a zoot suit with a crimson lining and some platform heels. But there are also two paintings of overflowing wheelie bins. Is this the 21st-century answer to Pop art's celebration of mass production? 'Yes, these paintings

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are certainly more complicated,' she admits – suggesting that she is just as conflicted over consumer culture as the rest of us.



Above: *Polizist* ('Policeman'), 2019, fabric, cotton, wood, wire, 200 x 60 x 40cm