

DIENSTGEBÄUDE Art Space Zürich

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Colin Guillemet *HALF FULL. HALF EMPTY.*

'The chief difficulty Alice found at first was in managing her flamingo; she succeeded in getting its body tucked away, comfortably enough, under her arm, with its legs hanging down, but generally, just as she had got its neck nicely straightened out, and was going to give the hedgehog a blow with its head, it would twist itself round and look up in her face, with such a puzzled expression that she could not help bursting out laughing...'

In an age when painting was dominant and sculpture readily scorned, Ad Reinhardt described sculpture as 'something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting'. Colin Guillemet's sculpture *Flamingo in a paper bag* (2013) is more likely to back into you, its eyes being directed at its claws and the ceiling against which they are wedged. The viewer cannot tell whether the flamingo has willingly adopted the position - as an ostrich might, figuratively, bury its head in sand - or is a victim of its fate, like the flamingos employed as mallets in the game of croquet in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'.

To grasp the nature of a foreign state, authors and artists often resort to images of less cognisant beings (or those we assume are less so). Carroll's bird's obstruction is an exception to the rule of dutifully aggressive hawks, cunning vixens or defenceless pigs drawn into the service of metaphors and fables. We credit them with given qualities, but don't have to identify with them. Art also functions as a malleable entity that needs only follow the logic of its maker. While you wouldn't suggest most art has consciousness, like other forms of fiction it offers a means to an appreciation of other states of being. Guillemet describes his works as "sliding into the subjunctive", a state that sustains both plausibility and absurdity. His works have a familiar entry point - a clichéd photograph, a practical diagram - but follow a tangent the viewer does not expect.

To add insult to the injured flamingo, it's often said of someone clueless that they couldn't find their way out of a paper bag. Guillemet, however, proposes that a paper bag or box can be obvious and universe enough. The first part of his two-chapter show uses the figure of a box as means for simultaneous clarification and obfuscation. 'Blueprint/Box trope' (2014), a series of blueprints on watercolour paper, illustrates boxes made for various storage purposes. While the method of the prints' making is transparent, their frames, even though in chipboard, are of an incongruous sophistication. *Half full / Half empty* (2014) is literally transparent: slides - transparencies - show a contortionist getting out of a clear Perspex box on one side and into another, then repeating the action. The viewer probably recognises that it's a single repeating sequence, but cannot shake the idea of transfer or equilibrium. Matisse's *Blue Nude II* is made manifest, absurdly schematically, for the viewer; the problem is that we then have to acknowledge the model as a sentient, complex being. The flamingo stares back at Alice.

The second chapter offers broader horizons, literally. An image of the sun setting over sea is the catalyst of *Impressions (laser) du soleil couchant* (2013) in which a stock image is bleached white or burned black by continual laser copying. Monet's dawn, so often reproduced and reused, meets its dusk in even more careless reproduction. All this is set before us, and yet that setting sun in the centre of the process just can't be loosened from its picturesque attraction. *Impressions...* is shown in tandem with *Hot for day for night* (2014) an egg filmed day for night (shot in the daytime with filters to give the impression of moonlight) as it fries in the sun for the duration of a cartridge of Super 8. Even though quite evidently something else, the bump of the egg's sunny yolk gleaming in the daylight has something undeniably in common with the other disk that drops beneath our horizon, or maybe it's the bright refracted light in both images that is captivating. Another platitude – so hot you could fry an egg on the pavement – made manifest, then subject to a transformation, one that even though in itself not convincing (day for night is rarely an effective illusion) renders the premise nonsensical but does not make the egg any less apparent.

Commonplaces occur repeatedly in Guillemet's work, which could be said to pay homage to them as much as it debunks them. He doesn't just point out the vacuity of common sense or common understanding, but asks who it is common to, or what commons we still have access to. Is our use of a given language a shared asset, or mere self-deception?

Colin Guillemet (born Paris, 1979) graduated from Central St Martins BA (2001) and Royal College of Art MA (2003). Since 2010, he lives and works in Zurich. This autumn, his work will be included in "Eternal September" Aksioma/Galerija Skuc, Ljubljana; "Picaresque" at Ha Gamle Prestegard, Stavanger, Norway; and at the NJIAF international art festival, Nanjing, China. In 2013 he was awarded a werkbeitrag from Kanton Zürich.

Text: Aoife Rosenmeyer