

The Meeting of the Present with the Absent Artist

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For people who shared literally, theoretical and musical preferences with Jutta Koether, it was always difficult to become accustomed to the fact that she had always so firmly taken the position of a painter. Why should all the many upheavals that she had taken part in: the literary traces of feminist-dandyist authors, beatniks, experimental existentialists and self-representation artists of music and total art, lead back to such a clearly defined old medium? Yet, over the course of time and naturally through a re-evaluation of painting, which some of her contemporaries and friends in Cologne made possible, one could only become accustomed to thinking that perhaps painting in particular, may be as an obsolete medium, in Walter Benjamin's sense, or as a result of the conceptual renewal brought about by Kippenberger and Kriebler, Oehlen and Polke, might be exactly the logical result of this intensive and diverse mixture of interests deriving from French poetry, British prose and American painting of the 19th and 20th centuries, together with feminist politics and American rock'n'roll.

Yet, those among Jutta Koether's friends and admirers who became accustomed to this constellation soon had to adapt to the next unfamiliar practice. Without relativizing the gesture of appearing as a painter and not as a new type of artist working with painting among other mediums, she insists on combining the exhibition of oil paintings, drawings, and other classical, more or less two-dimensional objects with performances of the most diverse kinds. The performances may be small readings of her own literary texts; staging's of dramatic texts that introduce and depict roles of her own or others' theoretical reflections; it may be music prepared by others; or her own music emerging spontaneously in the moment of performance—with JK on the guitar, as a singer, on the organ, on the harmonium, or even in various combinations of these and others in precisely defined portions.

From the beginning, these musical performances have been closely tied to the exhibition. There were often picture titles that recurred in song lyrics. Or dramatic texts became texts that could be discovered under a watercolour layer of a drawing, suddenly presented with percussion and turning out to be enigmatic words on pictures as titles of theoretical treatises. Nevertheless, these conjunctions were never to be understood in an additive sense or as a kind of "gesamtkunstwerk". Both activities, those that had to do with personal presence and those that could do without it, were to run alongside one another in the artist's understanding and not to be added together into any kind of expanded emphatic concept of art. In any case, they were to keep the idea of production open. Friends and supporters have long advised her not to further perplex an audience (already confused by an artist writing reviews, publishing literary texts and editing a music magazine) by presenting performance and still objects in parallel. Yet in time, even

this parallelizing became established as a production form that does not aim for a synthesis or aggregate, and is understood.

In recent years Jutta Koether, through collaboration with different groups, has set out on another new path: specifically one of pursuing literature, music and performances—works initially separate from one another. With Rita Ackerman she had the group “Diadal”. With the late Steven Parrino, “Electrophilia”. In various constellations, she made music, usually in duos, with Kim Gordon, Thurston Moore, Tome Verlaine and many others, and has released a whole series of CD’s, pure performances scores or contributed to collective novels. Collective production thus seems to pass as a possibility in the system of non-closing production forms. It enables that the concentration on single forms take on a life of its own, which is not possible in individual production. Why?

This could, in turn, have something to do with a fundamental insight or a decision that both the old parallel production and the new collective production are based on: namely that when you make something, produce a form, or a figure, you cannot simply rely on the background supplied by social habits and institutional constant, this must instead be co-supplied by a second, in relation to which the one is produced. In individual production this means, that a second individual production is added to the first, so that in collective production you can concentrate on an object, because the other producer is included as a second instance.