

GLADSTONE

Daniela Stoppel, "Lux Nova," *Artforum*, September 2017

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LUX NOVA

DANIELA STÖPPEL ON "KERSTIN BRÄTSCH: INNOVATION"

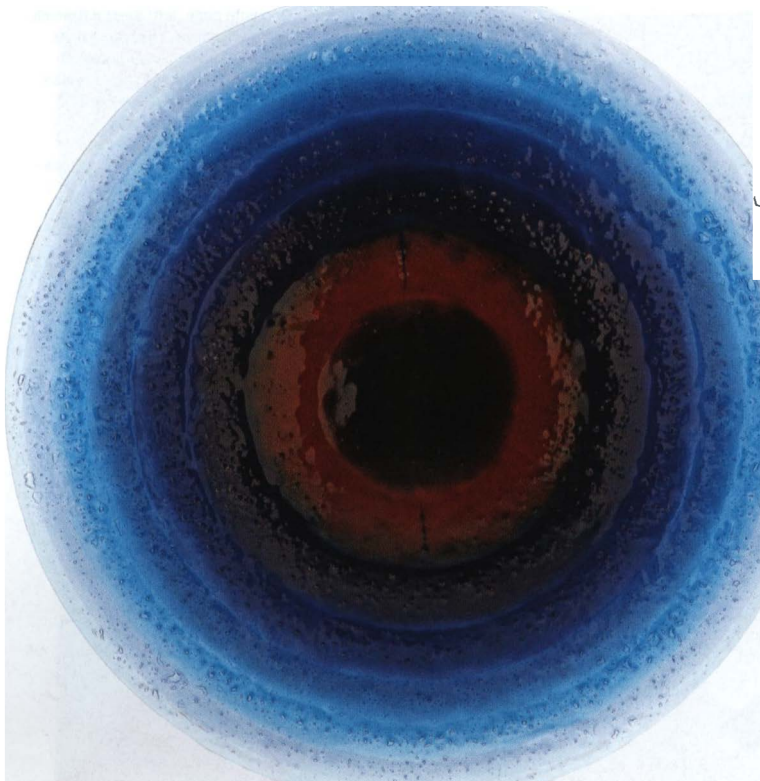
THE MULTIPLICITY AND ABUNDANCE of Kerstin Brätsch's collaborations, her voracious appropriations of precursors and models, and her disregard for the borders between genres and disciplines have made her a standard-bearer for a still surprisingly prevalent kind of art criticism—one that would like to see ironic gestures and the collapse of high and low not only as the main accomplishments of postmodernism but as the defining characteristics of contemporary art. Especially when considered as a painter, Brätsch seems predestined to serve first and foremost as an exemplary figure for the expansion of the still powerfully aura-laden medium of painting into the social field, since it doesn't take much to cast her work as a

stand-in for the totality of what David Joselit has called "painting beside itself."

The current survey exhibition of Brätsch's work at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich, however, disturbs this narrative. Here, we quickly see that humor is not the same as irony, that use is different from appropriation, and that mixing genres does not mean negating them. Such slippages seem key to the work that opens the show—a readymade that does in fact appropriate an advertising poster for a German compressor company also called Brätsch, bearing the tag line INNOVATION, which is also the title of the exhibition. This may be ironic, but it may (also) simply mean what it says: *innovation*, a term that can be understood in a

Opposite page, left: Kerstin Brätsch, *Poli'ahu's Curse: First Bone Chill*, 2012–16, luster and enamel on antique glass, drawn glass, glass jewels, agate, lead, 36 ½ x 25".

Opposite page, right: Kerstin Brätsch, *Because Loved Wildness (Mund der Wahrheit)*, 2015, luster and enamel on antique glass, drawn glass, glass jewels, church-window bordering, agate, lead, 37 ½ x 24 ¼".



Left: Kerstin Brätsch for DAS INSTITUT, *Blocked Radiant (for Ioana) Lens*, 2013, drawn glass, 43 1/2 x 43 1/2".

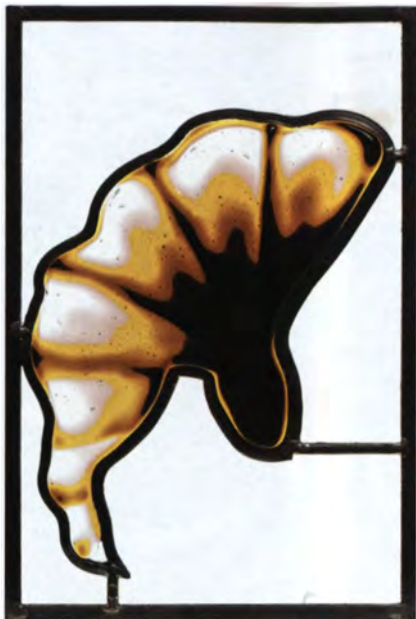
Right, from top: View of "Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation," 2017, Museum Brandhorst, Munich. From left: *Single Brushstroke in Lead (langer Wurm)*, 2014; *Lacrima di Pele (Naked Eye Planet)*, 2012–16. View of "Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation," 2017, Museum Brandhorst, Munich. Works from the series "Blocked Radiants (for Ioana)," 2011. View of "Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation," 2017, Museum Brandhorst, Munich. From left: *Untitled*, 2007; *Untitled*, 2007. Both from the series "Psychic," 2006–2008. View of "Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation," 2017, Museum Brandhorst, Munich. Photos: Uli Holz.



technical as well as an artistic sense, and one that, at least implicitly, posits a link to the modernist paradigm of progress through creativity and invention.

On the occasion of Brätsch's exhibition, the first floor of the Brandhorst has been emptied to make room for various groups of works from the past decade. These include some by DAS INSTITUT, a collective founded in 2007 and comprising Brätsch and Adele Röder, and some by KAYA, a collaboration between Brätsch and Debo Eilers that first showed in 2010. In the lower-level galleries are additional series of works Brätsch made with various other collaborators as well as under her own name, along with several videos documenting the artist's performances and a project created "for" DAS INSTITUT by the writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge.

Examples of the colorful, large-format paintings in oil on paper or Mylar film that are typical of Brätsch's oeuvre are distributed across the entire exhibition space. Her trademark swirls of paint and incorporation of digital source imagery (often made by Röder) can be seen in series such as "Corporate Abstraction," 2010–11; "New Images/Unisex," 2008–2009; and "Blocked Radiants (for Ioana)," 2011; and in a suite titled *Interchangeable Mylar (3 parts)*, 2011–. The patterning and brushstrokes in these works—which all share the same format, framing, and production techniques—bring to mind associations as varied as



Left: Kerstin Brätsch, *Single Brushstroke in Lead (Embryo)*, 2012, antique glass, drawn glass, lead, approx. 11 1/8 x 7 1/8".

Right: Kerstin Brätsch for DAS INSTITUT, *Blocked Radiant (for Ioana)*, 2011, oil on paper, 110 x 72". From the series "Blocked Radiants (for Ioana)," 2011.



Missoni knits, squeegee abstraction, and industrial textured-finish paint. But if grouping them together brings to the fore the serially produced decorativeness that runs through Brätsch's artistic production, it also makes clear how astonishingly resilient and strange these abstractions are, to the extent that they create the impression they could be automatic or even self-generating compositions.

In the lower gallery, the series "Psychic," 2006–2008, made up of highly abstract portraits Brätsch painted after meeting clairvoyants in New York, is presented in a custom-built metal folding-screen-style display system, while pieces from the "Unstable Talmantic Rendering" series, 2014–, lean against or hang on the walls. These psychedelic marbled works on paper make still more explicit the idea of self-generating painting: The technically complex marbling technique—devised by another collaborator, "master marbler" Dirk Lange—creates patterns, washes, and concentric swirls of color, which are also linked to the formal characteristics of the slices of agate embedded in some of the stained-glass works Brätsch created with the glass painter Urs Rickenbach. In this way, uncontrollability and chance emerge as formal impulses across the various groups of works, while the inclusion of semi-precious stones ground into smooth spheres emphasizes the relationship to the natural world and the importance of process in Brätsch's practice. On the one

These works seem like portals to another world.



Left: Kerstin Brätsch, *Forever Falling*, 2014–16, ink and solvent on paper, neon tubes, stone. From the series "Unstable Talismanic Rendering," 2014–. Installation view, Gió Marconi, Milan, 2016. Photo: Andrea Rossetti.

Below, left: DAS INSTITUT, *[... Co(s)mic Abstraction ...]*, 2016, digital video, color, silent, indefinite duration.

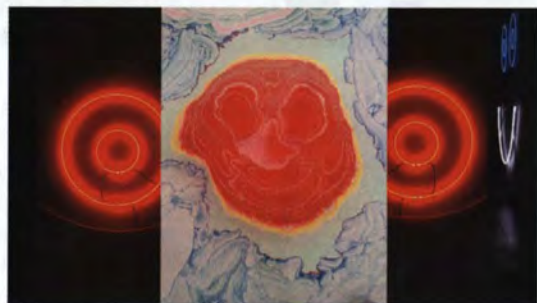
Right: Kerstin Brätsch for DAS INSTITUT and UNITED BROTHERS, *Interchangeable Mylar (3 parts)*, 2012, oil on Mylar, three parts, each 68 x 48".

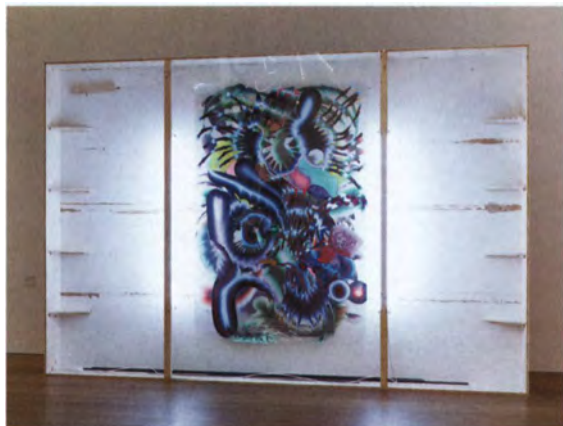


The artist's contemporary rituals allow one to get closer to a world of unreality and chance, beauty and conviviality.

hand, these objects look much like the polished stones sold at New Age conventions, thus bringing into play the lowbrow esotericism of such events, yet on the other they evoke spiritual transformation and symbolism in a way that is not only camp but suggests that painting, too, should be understood as an alchemical process.

Again and again, one encounters works that connect to the long history of auratically charged combinations of glass and light, from Chartres, say, to Gerhard Richter. Above the doorways on the ground floor are lenslike circular panes of colored glass that seem like portals to another world; works in drawn and rolled glass shine radiantly on metal stands, large colored Plexiglas sheets immerse several galleries in an otherworldly glow, and glass mosaic works integrating further slices of agate reveal bizarre faces and figures. So it is not much of a leap to make connec-





Left: View of "Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation," 2017, Museum Brandhorst, Munich. Kerstin Brätsch's *BONGGRIPPER_interchangeable Mylar (3 parts)*, 2015, displayed in DAS INSTITUT and UNITED BROTHERS's *Upright Solarium (Murphy Bed)_reenacted (Scheinwand)*, 2017. Photo: Uli Holz.

Right: Kerstin Brätsch, *Untitled*, 2007, oil on paper, 106 1/2 x 80". From the series "Psychic," 2006–2008.



tions to the idea of colored light as a vehicle for God's divinity in the Gothic mysticism of Abbot Suger, or early twentieth-century theosophist ideas about an aura that changes color depending on one's emotional state, even if Brätsch herself emphasizes above all the connections to the pantheon of gods in the indigenous religion of Hawaii.

These cultic aspects of Brätsch's oeuvre are also apparent in the video documentation of performances with her "painting." For example, a Hawaiian hula dance integrating Brätsch's works as ritualistic objects took place at the Serpentine Galleries in London in 2016, within an exhibition by Hilma af Klint—herself a pioneering abstract painter with close ties to early-twentieth-century spiritualism. From this perspective, the festive parades and dance performances that Brätsch has organized in collaboration with the

Japanese duo UNITED BROTHERS (Ei and Tomoo Arakawa) over the past six years appear not only as borrowings from pop culture or break with standard formats for painting and art but also as contemporary rituals that allow one to get closer to a world of unreality and chance, beauty and conviviality.

It turns out that, of all the people who have engaged with Brätsch's work, it is Kluge who best recognizes this endless, or at least unfathomable, dimension to her practice. In two video triptychs collectively titled *Fragmente für Das Institut, mit Glastafeln von Kerstin Brätsch* (Fragments for Das Institut, with Glass Panels by Kerstin Brätsch), 2017, he uses her glass pieces as "filters," overlaying the imagery with abstract structures as he generates a dense collage of found footage and interviews that, among much else, posits an equivalence between Socrates and the flayed satyr

Marsyas, which is to say that the work is about crime and punishment, ugliness and wisdom, and more generally about a history of humankind that can only be understood as dialectical.

In this way, the auratic, ritualistic, and autopoietic aspects of Brätsch's work appear not as mere quotations or references but as resolutely material: as a practice of immanence. And these materialities might, in a post- or neo-Symbolist fashion, in turn trigger or harness psychic and social energies that would compel us to confront fundamental questions about what it means to be human. □

"Kerstin Brätsch: Innovation" is on view at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich through September 17.

Translated from German by Alexander Scrimgeour.

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