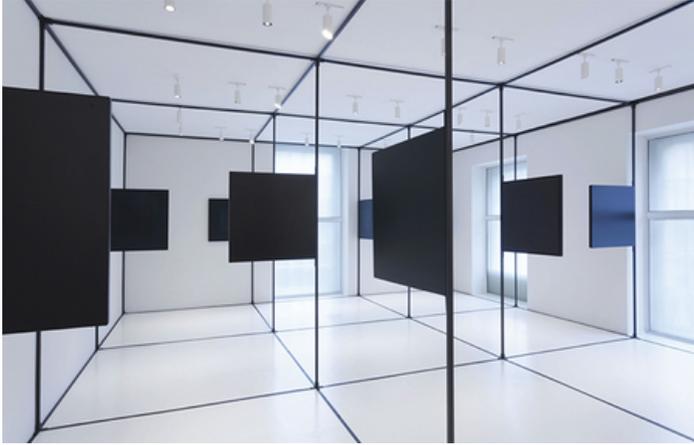


Karin Schneider

DOMINIQUE LÉVY | NEW YORK



View of "Karin Schneider,"
2016. Photo: John Berens.

IN PRINT



When will we exhaust the black square? When will it cease to be a beacon of the radical avant-garde or a buoy of perceptual purity or a veiled wink at what came before or the face that launched a thousand quips? In Karin Schneider's elegant and misleading show—elegant in its sparseness; misleading in that despite this sparseness it was full of material, including paintings, wall diagrams and drawings, film, sculpture, and writing extending over the two floors of Dominique Lévy, the pages of this magazine, a series of related performances, and a dense catalogue—the black square was a black hole for metaphors of black squares. Everything was consumed into it: representation, current world events, late capitalism, the anxiety of influence, gender trouble, the last century of philosophical and political theory, countries, poetry, semiotics. It's a powerful condition, but also a dangerous one: What is left?

The rooms felt like pages of a notebook realized in three dimensions. Downstairs, on a black steel armature forming a transparent cube, Schneider hung sixteen canvases. She mixed Mars black with the deep eggplant, navy, and greens of Ad Reinhardt's "black" monochromes from the 1950s and '60s, but instead of velvety cruciform shapes that float slowly to the surface of vision, she employed a single, flat square in the middle of a black canvas. This was a priming ground for another work that was, as yet, truly invisible: Whoever buys one of these paintings agrees to hand it over to an undisclosed artist, who will paint on top of it. (It's hard to imagine Kazimir Malevich, Reinhardt, Barnett Newman, et al., or their collectors, being so collaborative.) A film projector cast a loop of the Adriatic Sea on the far wall—a kind of late Mark Rothko slowly coming in and out of focus. The machine's whir could also stand in for the show's loud thinking.

Upstairs, a large black monochrome installed on the floor stretched like a Roman pool, consuming all reflection (referencing the Rothko Chapel, it also called to mind the dark voids inside of Michael Heizer's negative sculptures). An accompanying pamphlet explicated the works, using cryptic acronyms to denote the various art-historical figures the pieces cite. Are you reminded of Barnett Newman (BN)? His "Stations of the Cross" (SOC8) was invoked in a thin oil-and-coal canvas, while another painting referred to *Onement, I* (ONMI). Thinking about the abstract tangle of Matisse's (HM) blue nude cutouts (NBIII-I)? I wasn't, but the curled sculpture on the gallery's first floor were "extractions" (E) from them.

In a back gallery, a September 2016 issue of *Artforum* lay on the floor, open to a two-page ad for the show from the gallery: a black page adjacent to a photograph of a young child inside a refugee camp. On the surrounding walls, three black paintings respectively bore the country names SERBIA, POLAND, and SYRIA. While offering a glimpse out of the art-historical matrix, this was the least convincing exercise in diagramming visibility: What is the benefit of situating an image of the migrant crisis near a painting (in the front gallery) that compares and conflates the cancellation tactics of a desert scene by Tarsila do Amaral and a monochrome by Reinhardt? To do so seemed glibly totalizing, even as it underscored the homogenizing force of culture. (The recent uncovering of racist graffiti underneath Malevich's famous

Suprematist monochrome might have offered a more direct line to parsing the other side of pure abstraction's sublimations.)

I'm not sure what, as the exhibition literature promised, "multifaceted encounters with artworks" means exactly—it sounds painful—but I liked that the show was ambitious, a little aloof to its audience, and a little violent with its sources. Its meticulous networked conceptualism voided any transcendence, and the experience remained surprisingly physical. In mapping and cutting out art history's figures, Schneider wasn't afraid to posit the black square not so much as the paterfamilias to kill once and for all, but as an engine of what's to come, when we have traced the points of intersection among Western thought so many times that the connecting lines themselves form a solid polygon. Then, hopefully, we might find ourselves with a little more levity and a little less certainty. Embodying its name, the text on the farthest right of Schneider's wall diagram in the stairwell read simply FLOATING.

—Prudence Peiffer