

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Valentin Carron

303 Gallery // November 6–December 20, 2014

"MUSIC IS A S-S-SERIOUS THING" combines industrially produced objects with a nuanced sensuality in an effort to draw fruitful connections between capitalism, the body, and multimedia approaches to painting. On the walls are works made with vinyl ink on PVC tarpaulin framed only by steel tubing, while the gallery floor is populated with belts cast in glass and carefully arranged on kitschy furniture. This odd collection brims with melancholic life. From the immobilized belts that serve as humorously fragile symbols of masculinity to the tarpaulin that paradoxically ripples and flexes like skin, Carron's work examines long-standing discourses of the body within painting and sculpture.

In *Belt on Rattan Basket* (all works 2014), a belt slithers out of a basket like a snake, at once brushstroke and sculpture. The crosshatched texture of the basket stands in contrast to the smooth, painted belt. This produces a sensory disconnect reminiscent of Eva Hesse's 1968 *Accession II*, a steel cube interwoven with rubber tubes, or Meret Oppenheim's 1936 *Object (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)*, a teacup, saucer, and spoon covered in fur. Like Hesse and Oppenheim, Carron thrives on incongruous pairings; the rough interwoven material against the smooth skin of the belt engenders a tactile dissonance in the same vein as drinking from a hairy cup. Moreover, the belt is erotically charged, loaded with the possibility of loss and death. Where are the bodies to which these objects were meant to be affixed? One is reminded of Joseph Beuys's frequent use of fat, a gruesome metonym of once-vibrant lives that have been reduced to a solidified, anonymous mass.

A similar operation can be found in Carron's paintings on tarpaulin, which, because of the viscous, fast-drying nature of the toxic vinyl ink, retain the artist's mark like a tattoo. Largely composed of repurposed illustrations from books of the postwar years, these paintings marry the modern, industrial materials of steel-tube frames and tarpaulin with images that are self-consciously dated. Carron situates these historical conversations not on canvas but rather on metallic contraptions that, as a result of their tube frames, insist on their separation from the gallery wall, begetting a feeling that these objects are in a state of becoming. They are neither transparent windows onto the world nor wholly abstract distillations of the world, two camps between which painting oscillates as a discipline. Carron condenses these themes into *Cold Figure*, in which patches of pigment in simple geometric shapes tentatively compose a silhouetted form. The work becomes an entity that is in the process of decomposing and simultaneously reconstituting itself, echoing Carron's investment in materials that suggest impermanence even as they fearlessly expose their fragility. —William J. Simmons



RIGHT:
Birgit Jürgenssen
Houdini, 1990.
Black-and-white photographs and fabric, 47¼ x 47¼ in.

BELOW:
Valentin Carron
Installation view of *Belt on Bar Stool*, 2014.



NEW YORK

Birgit Jürgenssen

Fergus McCaffrey // November 6–December 20, 2014

THE ART WORLD'S CURRENT reexamination of art by women entails the usual wonderment over the practitioners' exceptional consideration of process, formalism, and conceptual rigor in the face of underrated valuations by academia and the market alike. So as the latest round of recognition adjusts the gender needle a fingerbreadth closer to parity, one reason the projects of women artists fail to produce sustained enthusiasm remains overlooked: the regular refusal by female practitioners to maintain focus on a single investigation, resulting in a lifetime of work that is often deemed too diffuse or diluted to be properly resolved. It's through this lens that the recent presentation of work from the 1980s and '90s by the late Viennese artist Birgit Jürgenssen, known for her feminist work of the '70s, is best viewed.

Occupying the second floor of McCaffrey's elegant Chelsea space, the show offers an impressive tour through Jürgenssen's broad studio practice, including photographic experimentation, fabric and metal work, and sculpture. The modernism of the 20th-century artist's personal vernacular emerges through surreal photographic compositions configured into grids that evoke the sentimental and nostalgic. A sinister edge, however, comes through courtesy of hand-wrought iron frames as well as a top layer of translucent fabric that effects a mechanized, nearly digital sheen on the works' surface. More experimentation is found in Jürgenssen's "painted photo" method, in which she manipulates the chemical interactions, then scratches the surface of the picture plane, forcing evidence of the artist's hand into the seamless mechanical process. Talismanic 3-D works of papier-mâché, wax, hair, and wire and detritus profess to bring the project into the realm of the profoundly personal. But even amid these seemingly pure investigations of expression, it's likely that the artist's feminist conceptualism, which examines both the body and its role in society, heightened the fortitude she brought to her more intimate work. The seeds of broader meaning make a clear point: The personal is political. —Deborah Wilk

FROM LEFT: VALENTIN CARRON AND 303 GALLERY; BIRGIT JÜRGENSSEN AND FERGUS MCCAFFREY