

ANDREA BÜTTNER

22 December 2017 – 17 March 2018

*I have no works* says a woodcut from 2017, exhibited by Andrea Büttner in Zuoz. The sentence is split into two parts: *I have* graces the color field on the left, *no works* marks the one on the right. Inscribed in this tension between two halves is a concession of failure as well as the affirmative celebration of *no works*. Büttner's multimedia practice – ranging from woodcuts and reverse glass painting to sculptures, film installations and textile pieces – examines such moments of convergence, challenges value systems and thought practices. The artist reflects on the status of ways of life, professions of faith, questions of authorship, techniques of representation and objecthood with an empathy that openly engages religious, profane, political, or philosophical perspectives. Büttner's works are ambiguous figures; on the one hand, they manifest a postmodern skepticism toward narrow and universalizing categories, on the other hand they embrace the search for the beautiful and humane. Their focus is the small and the overlooked, poverty, the motif of shame, the directness of certain gestures – themes that teach us something about dominant social conventions while exploring the relationships between the subjective and the collective in ethical and aesthetic processes.

Art making is always intimately connected to vulnerability, the question of what is disclosed and what remains hidden, the extent to which our sense of shame determines our actions and our judgements. *Beggar* (2015 – 2016), exhibited in the former hayloft, approaches this issue from the perspective of poverty. In these woodcuts, Büttner follows the pictorial formula developed by Ernst Barlach, according to the artist's own research the only art historical precedent to directly link shame and poverty. Büttner's heavily formalized color woodcuts show figures in attitudes of supplication. The veiled figures stretch out their arms, ashamed and embarrassed, hoping for the compassion of those they are addressing. The artist confronts us with an intimate situation that oscillates between gestures of withdrawal and appeal. She thereby positions this form of nonverbal expression as an intersubjective nexus between the moments of exposing and receiving.

Such reciprocal interactions and the special role of the gestural also characterize the series *Phone Etching* (2015). Büttner translated the traces of her fingers on an iPhone display into color etchings. These private protocols of use are thereby transformed into art on public view; communicative actions and digital search processes take on the formal properties of an abstract painting. The media transfer encompasses a reversal as well as an appreciation of value, since the etchings represent unassuming grease stains usually associated with dirtiness. The superimposition of the communication tools iPhone and etching challenges ideas of contemporaneity, while also playing with haptic difference. Büttner's works always contain an immanent physical quality, a visceral sense of their status as something made. As such the movements of the artist's body are inscribed in the etched lines of her woodcuts, as well as in her *Brown Wall Paintings*.

The wall, painted brown by the artist (*Brown Wall Painting*, 2017), extends as far as her arm. The paint plays on a range of associations, since its shade of chocolate brown is a heavily charged color unusual for a display of contemporary art. Büttner employs a similarly ambivalent formal language in her reverse glass paintings and woodcuts. *Breadpebble* (2012) and *Untitled (two pebbles)* (2009) vaguely evoke breadcrumbs, clumps of dirt, stones, potatoes or feces, while reverse glass collages such as *Bread Painting* (2016) explicitly depict the bread motif. These works are the result of Büttner's long term engagement with Arte Povera and monastic poverty movements. Everyday objects such as coins or potatoes, or inconsequential features such as potted plants or hills are brought into view, without ideological barriers. The limits of the supposedly trivial continue to blur in *Bench* (2012). The benches that Büttner often integrates in her installations are simultaneously sculptures and wooden seating. They transcend the separation between art and craft, fluctuate between aesthetic perception and unwieldy experience, frugal material and attributions of value – at once place and object of contemplation.

These themes of the relationship between “high” and “low” correspond with the physical fabric of the established gallery space in Zuoz, which retains the modesty of a rural dwelling even in its carefully refurbished state. Büttner's artistic reflection always includes the context of her work, be it in relation to art history, contemporaneity, or the role and position of art and artists. In Zuoz, Büttner's works are installed not in a white cube but in the historic spaces of a once destitute mountain village, which transitioned to a place of longing and subsequent real estate speculation during the 20th century. Büttner's works articulate subtly different ways across a variety of contexts. They invite a dialog while maintaining their own narrative: a search for a comprehensive experience supported by their arrangement as an installation. It is an art that seeks to include the rejected, the weak, and the marginal through colorful gestures, creating a dignified sphere that transcends time while remaining conscious of the contemporary moment.