

Stephanie Guse: A grotesque world - Shifting Reality

Stephanie Guse's world seems to be highly ordered. Her work consists of nice barbie-toys, hand-bags, jewellery and decorated wallplates. At first sight everything is part of a girl's fairy-tale world, in which everything has its place and nothing gets in the way.

Realistically, it is all about shifting reality. There are always nuances of deviation, discrepancy and paradoxical elements. When it comes to material, Guse dares to be awkward and uncool. She celebrates the appeal of trash, meditateness and a head-in-the-clouds attitude to life.

Her heart is set on rustic decorated wall-plates, a traditional arts and crafts genre, which places colourful floral ornaments on cupboards, tables or wooden plates. Guse ironises and modernises this old-fashioned design. Her motive is an abstract ironic adaption – she composes a medley of colourful blots, imitating virtuoso ornaments. She is not into detail-loving arts and crafts, but into abstraction and feeling shape. Nevertheless, she practises simulation, not in the context of the fashionable new media, but in a context which is consciously not up-to-date – even frowned upon. Guse broadens her special form of post-modern rustic arts and crafts to include common things. She investigates the current validity and sociability of that genre placing her decoration on cheap plastic-plates, garbage cans, plastic buckets and even on a lady-shaver. She points to the fact that everything fits better if it has the right cover. Imagine the target group of tradition-loving country people! It is all a fake!

The series „1:6“ is based on shifting reality as well. The title hints at the ratio (1:6) of a Barbie-doll's body in relation to the average size of an adult. Based on that relation one can transfer the doll's accessories into our world, which is dominated by norms and function. In that cheerfully-coloured Barbie-world, everything is small, but the artist doesn't accept that fact. She brings the beloved toys of her childhood into today's reality. She enlarges the equipment by a factor of 6, which makes them look puffed up. The unwieldy and non-functional objects cannot be situated in our everyday life. The comb is bulky and clumsy, which makes it difficult to use. A hand-bag and a camera look like they are from another planet.

To round off the effect Guse puts the accessories in realistic settings.

A polaroid photo-series shows a young woman looking like a little girl and happily presenting the oversized utensils. Polaroids claim to be real, which photography today still can't because of all the possibilities to manipulate that programmes like Photoshop give. Polaroids can't be manipulated. Nevertheless it is a lie!

The oversized format seems to fascinate Guse, who enlarges her artistic range by applying her zoom strategy onto jewellery. Once more she nonchalantly uses material which reminds the viewer more of home-made handcraft than of modern art i.e. salt-dough products. She moulds earrings and fingerings, necklaces and pendants, which are reminiscent of toys, though they look like grotesque contortions.

The photo series „Joeland“ shows Guse's preference for shifting reality in a ready-made context. In this case it is her sense of detail and the grotesque things in everyday-life which stimulate her work, some-

times it is life itself writing the ludicrous plot and shaping bizarre things. Guse took photos of seats on an Irish campground. The seats are built out of found and converted materials and placed over the whole site by the owner without any artistic intention.

They look like outdoor-sculptures with an 80's charm and remind one of artwork by contemporary artists who use furniture, like Urs Fischer or Franz Burkhardt.

Although these seating-objects haven't been created by an artist – it is Guse who puts them in an artistic context with her setting and poses questions about the producer. In general she asks, if a desire to create is necessary for the production of art.

Finally I'd like to come to the series of still-lives by Stephanie Guse. Once more, she is playing with a traditional genre, as it were an art-historical genre, although one barely playing a role in contemporary art. Again, she tends to work with an embarrassing theme; nevertheless she succeeds in enriching it with a thrilling new facet: the lie.

Nothing in her still-life is like it seems. Neither the skull, nor the plates or the food. The skull is moulded from tape; the table-wear is borrowed from Guse's plastic-plates; fruit and flowers are made of plastic and the appetizingly presented food is made of fly-paper. She uses a tacky „Bembel“ pitcher for apple-wine instead of a splendidly decorated one. Nevertheless, the lighting of this cheaply constructed still-life suggests Guse wants to beg for divine favour.

Pathos meets trash - falsehood meets truth. Guse is a highly subversive agent of reality.