



PEGGY FRANCK
SELECTED PRESS ARTICLES,
INTERVIEWS & ESSAYS

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peggy franck

Cecilia Canziani
art historian and curator kunsthistoricus en curator

Constellations

The truth is that Peggy and I do not know each other particularly well. I haven’t regretfully spent long hours discussing her work in the studio, we don’t share memories of formative college years, we haven’t worked together on a show (yet) and we’ve never, until the present occasion, collaborated. We don’t have, in other words, the kind of intimacy that the more I grow up (or the more I grow older), the more I find necessary in the relationship with an artist when it comes to writing about her practice. And yet I feel she is somehow present in my life: her works are part of the imagery I developed over years, I have often been thought about things through the lens of her practice, and I longed for an occasion to come closer to it in writing. I love her work, simple as that. Which I guess is an ultimate form of intimacy.

There’s more to the story: I came across Peggy through the late artist Bettina Buck, who invited her to a spatial conversation with her own works, as part of her ongoing project of exhibitions based on resonance and curiosity towards the practice of another artist. For Bettina, these invitations were a form of self-inquiry, a way of disrupting the format of the solo show, and showed a feminist, free, and liberating approach to the art system. I have no idea how they met, but – thinking of the way each explored their chosen media – it made sense. Peggy and I didn’t meet on the occasion of that show, but at Bettina’s wedding, where she toasted to the bride saying ‘I love Bettina and I love her car!’, which I think is the most precise description of both Bettina’s and Peggy’s attitude

Constellaties

Eerlijk gezegd kennen Peggy en ik elkaar niet zo goed. We hebben helaas geen uren over haar werk gesproken in haar atelier, we kunnen niet terugkijken op een gedeelde studietijd, we hebben (nog) niet samen een tentoonstelling gemaakt en tot nu toe nooit samengewerkt. We hebben met andere woorden niet de intimiteit die ik, naarmate ik volwassener of gewoon ouder word, bij het schrijven over de praktijk van een kunstenaar steeds belangrijker vind. Maar toch heb ik het gevoel dat ze op een of andere manier deel uitmaakt van mijn leven. Haar werk is onderdeel van de beeldtaal die ik door de jaren heen heb ontwikkeld; ik bekijk de wereld vaak door de lens van haar praktijk en verlangde naar een gelegenheid om via schrijven dichterbij het werk te komen. Kortgezegd: ik hou van haar werk. Wat naar mijn idee mogelijk de meest ultieme vorm van intimiteit is.

Er is nog meer aan de hand: ik kwam in contact met het werk van Peggy via de onlangs overleden kunstenaar Bettina Buck. Zij had vanuit haar eigen praktijk Peggy uitgenodigd voor een ruimtelijke dialoog met haar werk, voortkomend uit haar *ongoing* tentoonstellingsproject over resonantie en nieuwsgierigheid naar andermans kunstenaarspraktijk. Voor Bettina waren deze uitnodigingen een soort zelfreflectie, een manier om de opzet van de solotentoonstelling te verstoren en een uiting van een feministische, vrije en bevrijdende benadering van de kunstwereld. Ik heb geen idee hoe ze elkaar hebben ontmoet, maar als ik kijk naar de manieren waarop ze hun eigen medium verkennen, lijkt het een logische combinatie.



towards, well, life. I loved Peggy Franck for that too. Recently, I found out she is friends with Alessandra Spranzi, another artist friend of mine. During the months of Covid quarantine they would call and plot an exhibition, which ultimately didn't pan out and yet, knowing their practice, the plan makes total sense. So you see, a map of relations is slowly taking form. I trust artists' intuition, and I believe in intimacy by proxy too.

I would guess that Peggy Franck believes in it as well, as she entrusted me, during this burning summer, to respond to her works in an article and, as I wasn't able to visit the show in person, proposed a remote guided tour while she was installing. On a sunny afternoon, sitting still in a far away and yet similarly sunny room, I saw the show through the screen of a laptop while she was walking into the space coming from outside (so that I could get a sense of the building itself) to the interior. Maybe a phone would have been more apt a device for the task, and yet the limitations (and the efforts that it required to overcome them) that such a presence imposed on both of us soon became interesting and in a strange, nonlinear way, coherent. For proximity and distance, which set the scene for this text too, are the dialectic poles of her practice, and the mediation of the laptop – zooming in and zooming out – activated that tension and brought it forward.

The sculptural, the pictorial, the photographic exist in Peggy's work in relation to each other, as equivalent terms that allow her to compose an image by moving between different combinatory possibilities and reversible actions. Brushstrokes and objects can expand in space, or be compressed and flattened as photographs. A photograph can be rolled up and become an object or the background for another staged action. Painting suggests the organization of colours and volumes. A never-ending permutation, at the center of which stands the body – and the gaze – of the spectator which keeps on moving, keeps on moving. This is what I felt, amplified, remotely viewing the show from a distance, gently guided from the exterior of the building through its entrance, perambulating the space, climbing a staircase, looking at the sun playing with the works in the two rooms hosting the exhibition, while the laptop camera framed the space, isolated details, losing or sharpening the focus as a free, independent eye rolling over the surfaces with no obligations towards gravity, or verticality, for that matter. My body – my eyes.

I started thinking that this admittedly odd and very specific experience of her show mirrored the performativity that is inherent to her work and the fact that her paintings do not have orientation, as they expand in space or take a spatial form or migrate from one surface into another.

The transparency of the building, whose walls are punctuated by windows at regular intervals, was the first aspect that Peggy commented upon, served as the inspiration for the intervention she conceived for Club Solo. In other occasions she has painted walls and ceilings and let colour take over the space, but never the ground. Like creatures of the wind is a floor painting the size of the room. It seeks a novel engagement between her work and the body of the viewer, but also, I would say, between the visitor's body and her own. Moving fast, as acrylic dries quickly, she made splashes or marks or blotches of colour, depositing layers or mixed colour intuitively on the surface. Surrounded by her painting, she never had full control of the composition she was building. Looking at the work with my disembodied eye, I lost orientation too. I was – and you, spectator, are – in the middle of the work. Its very centre. As close as you can ever get to a painting, touching it with your own body, and because of that intimacy, incapable – unless you walk away from it – of fully embracing it. I was, and you are, at the same distance that Peggy kept

Peggy en ik hebben elkaar niet bij die tentoonstelling ontmoet, maar op Bettina's bruiloft. Daar hief Peggy het glas op de bruid, met de woorden 'I love Bettina and I love her car!', wat naar mijn idee het meest perfect weergeeft hoe ze beiden in het leven staan. Ook daardoor viel ik voor Peggy Franck. Onlangs kwam ik er ook achter dat ze bevriend is met Alessandra Spranzi, een kunstenaar die ook een vriendin van mij is. Tijdens de Covid-lockdowns spraken ze elkaar vaak over de telefoon en smeedden ze een plan voor een tentoonstelling die uiteindelijk niet plaatsvond, maar voor zover ik hun praktijk ken, zou het volstrekt logisch zijn. Zie hier, de plattegrond van onze verbindingen, die zich langzaam ontvouwt. Ik vertrouw op de intuïtie van kunstenaars en ik geloof in nabijheid als vorm van intimiteit.

Ik zou denken dat Peggy Franck daar ook in gelooft, aangezien ze mij ergens deze zinderende zomer gevraagd heeft over haar werk te schrijven. Omdat ik de tentoonstelling niet kon bezoeken, stelde ze een rondleiding-op-afstand voor, tijdens de opbouw van haar tentoonstelling. Op een zonnige middag, terwijl ik stil en ver weg in een net zo zonnige kamer zat, keek ik naar de tentoonstelling via haar laptopscherm waarmee zij van buiten naar binnen liep (om mij ook een idee te geven van het gebouw). Het was misschien makkelijker geweest met een mobiele telefoon, maar de beperkingen die de aanwezigheid van de laptop ons oplegde (en de moeite die kwam kijken bij het overwinnen ervan), werden al snel op een vreemde en non-lineaire manier interessant en coherent. Nabijheid en afstand, waar ook deze tekst op is gebaseerd, zijn namelijk de twee dialectische uitersten van haar kunstenaarspraktijk, en de laptop, die als bemiddelaar in- en uitzoomde, activeerde die spanning en bracht hem op de voorgrond.

Het sculpturale, het beeldende en het fotografische bestaan in Peggy's werk in relatie tot elkaar, als gelijkwaardige begrippen die haar in staat stellen een beeld op te bouwen door verschillende combinaties en omkeerbare handelingen met elkaar te verbinden. Kwaststreken en objecten kunnen zich in de ruimte uitbreiden of juist worden gecomprimeerd en platgemaakt, tot foto's. Een foto kan worden opgerold en zo een object worden, of als achtergrond dienen voor een geësceneerde actie. Schilderen impliceert het arrangeren van kleuren en volumes. Een eindeloze permutatie, met in het middelpunt het lichaam (en de blik) van de beschouwer, die aldoor in beweging blijft. Dat voelde ik in versterkte mate toen ik op afstand aan de hand werd genomen, eerst buiten het gebouw, toen binnen via de ingang, wandelend door de ruimte, de trap op, kijkend naar de zon die naar binnen scheen en met het werk in de twee tentoonstellingsruimtes speelde, terwijl de camera van de laptop de ruimtes kadreeerde, er details uit lichtte, de focus verloor of juist scherp stelde als een vrij, onafhankelijk oog dat op eigen kracht langs de oppervlakken gleed, zonder enige aandacht voor zwaartekracht of voor het onderscheid tussen onder en boven. Mijn lichaam – mijn ogen.

Ik besepte dat deze weliswaar vreemde en zeer specifieke ervaring van haar tentoonstelling de performatieve inslag die inherent is aan haar werk spiegelt en ook het feit dat haar schilderijen geen ruimtelijke oriëntatie kennen. Ze breiden zich in de ruimte uit, nemen een ruimtelijke vorm aan of migreren van het ene oppervlak naar het andere.

De transparantie van het gebouw, waarvan de muren op regelmatige afstand worden doorbroken door ramen, was het eerste waar Peggy op reageerde en wat haar inspireerde voor haar interventie bij Club Solo. Eerder al heeft ze muren en plafonds beschilderd, en kleuren de ruimte laten overnemen, maar nooit de grond. *Like creatures of the wind* is een vloerschildering ter grootte van de benedenzaal. Het probeert een nieuwe relatie tussen haar werk en het lichaam van de beschouwer te leggen, en naar mijn idee ook tussen het lichaam van de beschouwer



between her gaze and her hand while painting. Occasionally, a ray of sun can interfere with the work, shadows can obscure the brightness of the colour. There is not much control you can have over your experience, no specific point of view from which to appreciate the painting, no rules really. You can wander, meander and wonder. And lose yourself in the painting. And feel a certain pleasure, a sort of elation, while getting lost. Keep on moving.

On an end wall of the room, a C-print from 2007 brings into the present a work belonging to a different phase of Peggy's oeuvre, when she used to create elaborate stage sets that were created solely for the purpose of the shooting, and lasted solely for that time. Constantly rearranged in different configurations, the objects of the sets would lose an immediate relation to sculpture to become images – temporarily.

The image remains performative in nature as the folding and falling and curling of the elements appearing in the frame suggests impermanence; refers to an action.

Preaching Nicknames stands as counterpoint to the large installation: small in size due to the scale of the space, it appears, even if it is not, black and white in the colour-saturated ground room.

This set interior (we'll have to come back to this definition) serves as the stage for an older work: a black-and-white, blurred photograph that Peggy made with a pinhole camera as an art student in 1997. Posing naked on all fours, on a table, with an apple in her mouth, the artist's own body is both offered as and denied as the movement blurs the image and the careful staging is undermined by the grotesque pose. (Peggy is beautiful, and in her twenties she was beautiful too, if not more. I love the way in which she dismisses it by the way she uses her body in this photograph, as if she is declaring that the body is a medium, and as such open to transformation.)

This photograph of a photograph offers itself as a methodological note to the whole exhibition. It tells us that both works appearing in this room are ultimately actions performed by the artist's body.

It anticipates that despite being site-specific to the space, *Like creatures of the wind* could in the future be translated into another constellation. Closeups of this painting, once photographed, can be transferred onto paper or onto a carpet, be hung or positioned on the ground, isolated or in conversation with other elements, signs and images. There is no end and no beginning to a work but rather a circularity of actions performed through translations from medium to medium. *Preaching Nicknames* also clarifies that the space in which we are walking is an equivalent to the space that appears as print and that one is in relation to the other. The interior, for philosopher Walter Benjamin, is the space that belongs to the true collector (a figure that stands for himself and by extension for the artist), who is capable of reviving the magic of objects by putting them in different narrative configurations. It is also a space that folds around the body as a shell and unfolds like the sky. Painting, in Peggy's work, activates such tension and such a shift between an inner and outer space, and in this exhibition she lets us experience it with our own body.

A specific physical engagement with the artwork is also significant in the second-floor hall, where Peggy's retrospective focuses on object-based pieces only. These three-dimensional sets are interpretations of existing works, rearranged and re-signified for the present occasion.

I recognized some elements: a bathtub, a large C-print of a painting, a column made of photographic paper with an

en het hare. Snel werkend, want acryl droogt snel, bracht ze vlekken, vegen en spatten in kleur aan, terwijl ze intuïtief lagen toevoegde en kleuren op het oppervlak mengde. Omringd door haar 'schilderij', had ze nooit de volledige controle over de compositie die ze aan het opbouwen was. Toen ik door mijn lichaamloos oog naar het werk keek, raakte ik ook mijn oriëntatie kwijt. Ik was – en jullie toeschouwers zijn – midden in het werk. Het absolute centrum. Zo dichtbij als je maar bij een schilderij kunt komen: aanrakend met je eigen lichaam en juist door deze intimiteit, niet in staat – tenzij je een stap terugdoet – het volledig te omvatten. Ik was, en jij bent, op dezelfde afstand die Peggy tijdens het schilderen tussen haar blik en haar hand aanhield. Af en toe kan een streepje zonlicht het werk verstoren of kan een schaduwpartij de helderheid van de kleuren vertroebelen. Er is weinig controle over je ervaring, geen ideaal gezichtspunt van waaruit je het 'schilderij' kunt bekijken, geen regels. Je kunt lopen, dwalen en jezelf verwonderen. En jezelf verliezen in de schildering. En plezier ervaren, een soort opgetogenheid, terwijl je verdwaalt. Blijf in beweging.

Aan de korte zijde van de zaal hangt een C-print uit 2007 die een werk uit een eerdere fase van Peggy's oeuvre naar het hier en nu brengt. Destijds bouwde ze omvangrijke sets die hun bestaansrecht en levensduur ontleenden aan één enkele fotoshoot. Doordat ze de objecten waaruit de sets bestonden voortdurend verplaatste en herschikte, verloren ze hun directe relatie met sculptuur en werden ze – tijdelijk – tweedimensionale afbeeldingen.

Het beeld blijft performatief van aard, omdat het vouwen, vallen en krullen van de elementen die binnen het kader verschijnen vergankelijkheid suggereren en naar een actie verwijzen. *Preaching Nicknames* staat in scherp contrast tot de grote installatie: klein in formaat ten opzichte van de schaal van de ruimte, steekt het (ook al is het dat niet) als een bijna zwart-wit element af tegen de door kleuren verzadigde benedenzaal.

Deze interieur-set (we moeten nog eens terug komen op deze definitie) dient als podium voor een ouder werk: een onscherpe zwart-witfoto die Peggy in 1997 als kunststudent met een pinholecamera maakte. Op de foto poseert ze naakt op handen en knieën op een tafel, met een appel in haar mond, en wordt het eigen lichaam van de kunstenaar zowel aangeboden als teruggetrokken, terwijl de beweging het beeld vervaagt en de zorgvuldige compositie wordt ondermijnd door de groteske pose. (Peggy is mooi en als twintiger was ze ook mooi, zo niet nog mooier. Ik hou ervan hoe ze dat afwijst, door de manier waarop ze haar lichaam in deze foto gebuikt, alsof ze wil zeggen dat het lichaam maar een medium is, en dus onderhevig aan transformatie.)

Deze foto-van-een-foto dient als methodologische aantekening voor de hele tentoonstelling. Het maakt duidelijk dat beide werken in deze ruimte uiteindelijk acties zijn die door het lichaam van de kunstenaar zijn uitgevoerd.

Hieruit spreekt ook de verwachting dat *Like creatures of the wind* in de toekomst kan worden vertaald naar een andere constellatie, hoe plaats-gebonden het werk nu ook lijkt. Close-ups van deze schildering kunnen op papier worden afgedrukt of op tapijt worden geprint, ergens worden opgehangen of neergelegd, geïsoleerd of in dialoog met andere elementen, tekens en beelden. Er is geen begin of eind aan een werk, maar eerder een circulariteit van acties die worden uitgevoerd door middel van vertalingen van medium naar medium. *Preaching Nicknames* maakt ook duidelijk dat de ruimte waarin we lopen gelijk staat aan de ruimte die als print verschijnt, en dat beide in relatie tot elkaar staan. Het interieur is voor filosoof Walter Benjamin de ruimte die toebehoort aan de ware verzamelaar (iemand die voor zichzelf







acrylic sheet balancing on top and taking the shape of the rim, wires and carpet rolls, and two round mirrors, which I remembered appearing either as sculptures or as props in staged photographs.

Positioned side by side at a regular distance from the walls, the eight installations encourage the viewer to pause right in front of each. If a sculpture invites the viewer to explore the work from all sides, to move around it, to use the body as a way to measure it, these arrangements call for a frontal observation. They are not installations anymore, but paintings, or rather, they are secular altar pieces, choreographed in the space and connected by a recurring gesture: a lightbulb, standing in front of each and acting more as a marker, rather than solely providing light.

The interplay between opacity and transparency, reflections and darkness, forefront and background, the selection of tones, the layering in the composition belongs to the language of painting, which is fully declared as subject of Peggy's investigation in *Whispering different voices (II)*, where a fallen plastic sky and light blue cotton clouds appear framed by a cherry wood rectangle.

While looking at the details of each installation that Peggy sent me, I am taken by the power that each particle emanates – as an iconologist, I am tempted to think of each as a symbol. The photographs provide a glimpse of the artist's body too. A hand, the chin, a foot, as it is fragmented and reflected in the works. The details then start to suggest another story, that air that blows from downstairs to the second floor and sets in motion the exhibition, which fully closes around my body – your body – as a canvas, which is also the world.

staat, maar ook de kunstenaar representeert), die in staat is de magie van objecten nieuw leven in te blazen door ze in verschillende verhalende samenstellingen te plaatsen. Het is ook een ruimte die zich als een huls om het lichaam vouwt en zich als de hemel openvouwt. In Peggy's werk activeert het schilderen een zekere spanning en verschuiving tussen een binnen- en de buitenruimte, en bij deze tentoonstelling laat ze ons dat met ons eigen lichaam ervaren.

In de bovenzaal is ook sprake van een betekenisvolle, specifieke fysieke verbinding met het werk. Daar richt Peggy's tentoonstelling zich uitsluitend op object gerelateerde stukken. Deze driedimensionale sets zijn interpretaties van bestaande werken die voor deze gelegenheid opnieuw zijn samengesteld en nieuwe betekenissen hebben gekregen. Ik herkende een paar elementen: een badkuip, een grote C-print van een schilderij, een zuil van fotopapier waar een acrylaat plaat bovenop balanceert en de vorm van een kader aanneemt, bedrading, tapijttrollen, en twee ronde spiegels die in mijn herinnering eerder als sculpturen of rekwisieten in geënceneerde foto's te zien waren.

De acht installaties, naast elkaar op regelmatige afstand van de muur geplaatst, nodigen de toeschouwer uit om telkens recht voor een ervan stil te blijven staan. Waar een sculptuur je ertoe aanzet er omheen te lopen, het werk van alle kanten te bekijken, het lichaam te gebruiken als observatiegereedschap, vragen deze opstellingen eerder om een frontale beschouwing. Het zijn geen installaties meer maar schilderijen, of beter gezegd, het zijn seculiere altaarstukken die gechoreografeerd in de ruimte opgesteld staan, verbonden door een terugkerende geste: voor ieder stuk staat een lamp, die eerder als markerpunt is geplaatst, dan als bron van verlichting.

Het spel tussen doorzichtigheid en ondoorzichtigheid, weerspiegelingen en duisternis, voorgrond en achtergrond, de selectie van kleurtinten, de gelaagdheid van de compositie, behoort tot de taal van de schilderkunst, waar Peggy's onderzoek in *Whispering different voices (II)* volledig aan is toegewijd. Daarin verschijnen, omlijst door een rechthoek van kersenhout, een gevallen plastic hemel en wolken van lichtblauw katoen.

Terwijl ik naar de details kijk van elke installatie die Peggy me toestuurde, word ik gegrepen door die kracht die elk onderdeel uitstraalt – als iconoloog ben ik geneigd de onderdelen als symbolen op te vatten. De foto's laten ook een glimp zien van het lichaam van de kunstenaar. Een hand, de kin, een voet, gefragmenteerd aanwezig en weerspiegeld in het werk. Vanuit de details komt er een nieuw verhaal op gang: dat van de wind die van de begane grond de eerste verdieping inwaait en de tentoonstelling in beweging zet, die mijn lichaam – jouw lichaam – helemaal omsluit, als een schilderdoek dat ook de wereld is.















Peggy Franck: With no hands. Like a sea

For her first exhibition at Arcade gallery in London, Peggy Franck has installed her paintings, photography and printed carpets, creating a layered installation like a stage set



Arcade, London

16 November – 17 December 2016

by HARRIET THORPE

Layered work, painting, photography and installation become one visual experience in the work of Dutch artist Peggy Franck (b1978). At her first show with Arcade gallery in London, she presents “extracts” of previous exhibitions, combining the works into new sets or constellations.. The walls have become painted backdrops for scenes of framed pictures and unrolling reels of abstract carpets where Franck mixes the boundaries of material and medium, urging the viewer to move closer, step back and then move closer

When looking at Franck's work, the viewer progresses through moments of visual recognition, gradually translating how a painting is actually a photograph of a painting, which is a photographed reflection, hanging within an interior. Franck alternates her focus between these layers of painting, photography and installation depending on her feeling about the space in which she shows them.

The gallery at Arcade is an irregularly shaped space with an alcove in one corner and a wide bay window, like an old-fashioned shop front, that looks on to the street. "I liked the roughness of the ceiling and the floor," says Franck. "And the windows, of course. They create a framed image of the exhibition from the street: it's like looking through the viewfinder of a camera."

Framing is an integral part of Franck's process. The edges of walls, bookcases and door frames, the regular shape of a piece of shiny card, the edge of a carpet – these all become frames for her paintings; she is always looking through the lens of materials.

"Figurative painting, that's how I started making photographs," says Franck. "Back then, I used these photographs to paint from." It was at that time, while studying at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, that in her studio she started to build the layers of her process. "At first I just showed the photographs, then I slowly started to show the objects inside the photographs next to the photographs."

Yet while photography and installation are integral, it is the abstract quality of Franck's work that hits you first, squarely in the face, with the gestural splashes across the walls in bright pastel colours. "They draw you in and also push you away again," she says. The work *A shift in focus* (2012) is a piece of recycled plastic in a frame, yet, because of its colour scheme and abstract quality, it could almost be mistaken for a pastel-smudged painting by Franck herself. "I'm always interested in new materials, and this one struck my eye because of its painterly qualities – it's a found painting from interior design."

The exhibition feels quite domestic; smaller framed photographs hang on walls of thick brush strokes repeating like a wallpaper, and carpet rolls become surreal pieces of furniture. "It's like an extract of an interior from somebody's house," says Franck. "Usually, I enlarge the photographs a lot more, so the objects in the photographs become almost life-sized, but for this show I decided to make them smaller because I like the way you receive the bigger things, and then have to move closer to look at these smaller images, creating a different physical engagement of the viewer."

“When I worked in Lucebert’s studio for a residency – he was a CoBrA-related artist and poet – I used his house and studio as a setting for my work and went into a dialogue with the traces of his work. I stayed there for nine months, working within this very specific space.” Known simply as Lucebert, Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk (1924-94) created abstractly figurative paintings that were deeply expressive, and his studio space left Franck many possibilities to work with, hanging and layering her own works in the space and then photographing them.

This way of working is something that she intends to experiment more with: “I thought, after doing projects in the house of Lucebert and with the archive of late collector Wil Heins, it would be nice to go into dialogue with a living artist to look into his or her process. It’s a new idea, and I don’t know yet whether or not the artist should be present.”

The spaces Franck works in all have an intimate feeling: unlike a white-cube gallery, they bring their own history and impressions. The space becomes part of the work, another canvas, for her canvases. “The work is about opening up space, and space, and space again. I don’t make the narrative: it’s up to you, the viewer. Definite or clearly defined plans are never my starting point. I look for something more continuous. Perhaps that’s why I’m attracted to abstract art – it opens things up in my mind.”

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Peggy Franck



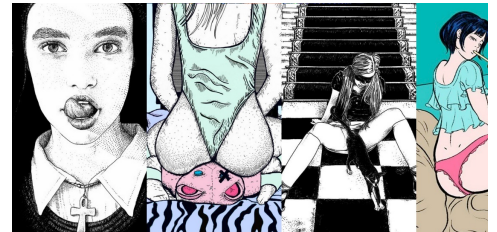
– Peggy Franck. Photo ©Maxime Ballesteros

Peggy Franck’s instinctive eye is drawn to form. Traversing the disciplines of photography, installation and painting, she began her material explorations by setting up sculptural tableaux in her studio and then photographing them. The desire to immerse the viewer in that image then took hold and Franck started to open up the compositions themselves, transferring the objects she had assembled in her studio to the gallery space, “so that it is easier for the person to connect to the image.”

As a result, her assemblages of plexiglass, fabric and other objects selected for their physical qualities become illusory environments, where forms echo and resonate associatively. Using mirrors as “another window in the picture”, she arranges and rearranges the ephemera in her studio, creating increasingly complex psychological



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spaces.

Her occasional representation within these webs of meaning, and her interest in the effect of representing the author's body as a presence within the work, owe something to her interest in artists' studios – specifically those of the American abstract impressionist Helen Frankenthaler and German sculptor Eva Hesse. Since moving from Amsterdam to Berlin for her residency at Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in April 2010, the paintings which previously were one fragment of the installations, are now what she is working on as pieces in their own right. Regardless of the final medium, Franck's process is distinct – the clashing of everyday materials, from spraypaint to Hula Hoops, to produce “unclear dramatic worlds” filled with relational forms, textures and surfaces.

Text by Susanna Davies-Crook



Seeking Out Style In Berlin's Most Pathetic Platz



Nobuyoshi Araki's 10 Most Controversial Photos (NSFW)

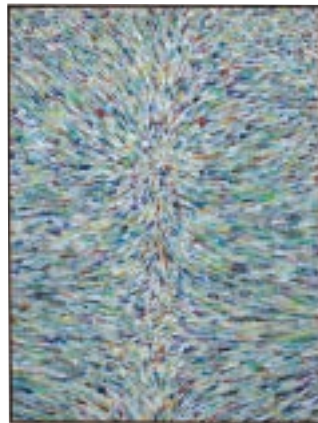
sleek ART

Shape-shifter

Peggy Franck

A riot of multicoloured spots swim before my eyes, like a whirlwind of pixels, or an explosion of confetti. The codes of presentation tell me this is a painting – its frame, size and installation on a wall – and its references are certainly painterly – the palette of Monet reworked through the exploding dynamic of Pollock, perhaps – but the surface of the material tells another story. It is in fact a readymade, a sheet of recycled plastic, in which the melted fragments of many colours are fused together into one decorative surface.

The work is called *A Shift In Focus* (2012) and does indeed mark a shift in the ever-evolving practice of Peggy Franck. She started working predominantly with photography and, during her residency at the Rijksakademie (Amsterdam, 2005-2006), moved into producing installations that she treated as sets to be photographed, sometimes keeping and reworking the same set for several different projects. Whilst theatrical in nature – in their combination of colours, materials, and surfaces – these sets remained abstract environments, devoid of narrative. At times, Franck's camera would zoom in on particular details, such as the juxtaposition of a smooth curl of paper with the crumpled surface of a silver survival blanket. At others, she would incorporate the complete constructed environment in the image. These photographs were printed on



a large scale, almost replicating the original size of the set and playing with the *trompe l'œil* possibilities afforded.

To heighten the confusion between the real and its representation, Franck also presented some of the photographed elements in front of the photographs. For example, in *Twilight: The Folded Space and The Wrapped Up Soul* (2006), a white roll of paper stands like an architectural column in front of a large black and white photograph in which it also appears, surrounded by naïve but evocative shapes. A hoop adorned with silver triangles suggests a symbolic sun, or the abandoned prop of a circus lion tamer. The image's grayscale however makes for a sombre landscape and reminds me of the twilight photographs of Gerard Byrne (*A Country Road. A Tree. Evening*, 2008), inspired by Beckett's setting for the play *Waiting for Godot*.

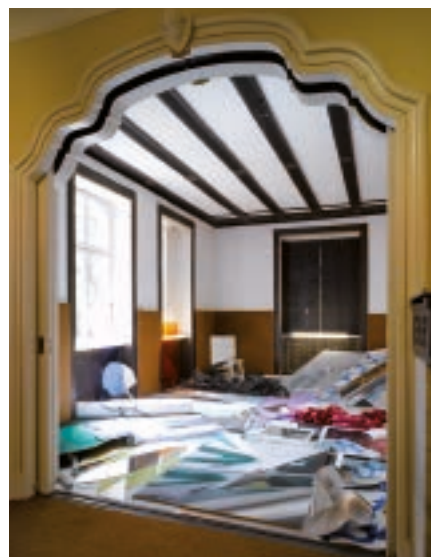


A Shift In Focus, 2012
Plastic in frame, 200 x 150 cm
Photo: Peggy Franck

Twilight: The Folded Space and The Wrapped Up Soul, 2006
Inkjetprint on canvas, paper, 295 x 375 cm
Installation view, Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam
Photo: Willem Vermaase

Rocking Motion, 2008
Diverse materials, dimensions variable
Installation view, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster
Photo: Roman Mensing

The themes of presence and absence that underpin Beckett's play also run through Franck's work. In many of her pieces, she creates the impression that we have just missed the action, that we are seeing the remains of a process, the traces of the artist's presence. In some of her photographs (for example, *Preaching Nicknames*, 2008), she incorporated images of herself inside her installations, always disguised in some way. She came to realize, however, that it introduced too obvious an element of narrative, breaking the composition's sense of scale and interrupting the flatness of the image. She also moved away from placing objects that featured in her photographs directly in front of the image, as she felt that it was prompting viewers to read both elements too literally. Instead, she developed a more fluid interaction between photography and installation, allowing some materials or forms to migrate between different images and compositions. Nevertheless, materiality remains a central concern, and all her photographs are analogue, allowing us to savour the grain of



There's No Ordinary World To Wake Up In, 2009
Diverse materials, dimensions variable
Installation view,
Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster
Photo: Roman Mensing

the printed images as much as the details they depict.

Franck's titles often comment upon her thinking process, such as *How An Uncomfortable Moment Made Things Move In A Pleasant Direction* (2007), or *Disliking My Own Self-control* (2007). Shortly after making these works, she began to develop installations that were freer, at times even riotous. *Nights at The Circus, or Another Book I Didn't Read* (2008), for example, features a backdrop of gold paper, like a detail of an opera décor, in front of which several objects are staged: three draped cones of blue fabric, a suspended black ribbon drawing a drunken looping line through the air, a fragment of wall, made from white breezeblocks and sprayed with wing-like graffiti, and various upright rolls of white paper. On another plane, a number of mirrors are visible. One circular mirror is placed directly on the floor, another lies flat on a stool, and a square one leans nonchalantly against the wall. Amidst this visual cacophony, an amorphous shape made from melted, colourless Perspex sits atop a trestle, and on the wall is pinned a photograph of the opposite corner of the installation. The effect is sumptuous, seductive, and highly sculptural.

Similarly baroque installations were created by Franck for her solo show entitled *In Rocking Motion* (Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2009). The exhibition took place in a bourgeois villa, with Franck's pieces riffing upon its ornate and colourful interior. The room-filling installation *There's No Ordinary World To Wake Up In* (2009) was a predominantly horizontal work that superposed layers of different materials – paper painted with geometric patterns, photographs of this paper, crushed fabric, and sheets of reflective plastic – to kaleidoscopic effect. *Rocking Motion* (2008) appeared like



an abandoned tableau vivant or mobile photographic portrait studio. In front of an abstract, painted backdrop, an unrolled sheet of white paper created a stage on which stood three characters: two ghost-like forms of suspended fabric, and a vertical column of paper, painted with broad black stripes and capped with a folded Perspex form, reminiscent of the wings of a nun's starched wimple. Larger versions of such figures stood in the villa's pink entrance hall: a vertical roll of paper with graffiti-like markings alongside columns of rolled inkjet prints (*Waiting For The Quiet Moment To Come*, 2009), all crowned with Perspex shapes. They are almost a condensation of the ideas of Franck's installations into individual forms, and over the subsequent two years, a simplification or paring-down of materials would become visible in her work, combined with a growing interest in painting.

In response to an invitation to create a site-specific installation for the exhibition

The Shape We're In (Zabludowicz Collection, London, 2011), Franck produced *Reading And Being Read To* (2011). It consisted in a sequence of paintings on sheets of Perspex leant against a rough wall bearing the traces of previous exhibitions (to which she furthermore added various bursts of colour). Perhaps as a reaction to her own earlier pieces, with their carnivalesque combination of colours, forms, materials and media, Franck began to make very minimal paintings, using monochrome marks of acrylic paint, gouache and ink on clear sheets of Perspex (in works such as *Her Unoccupied State*, 2011). In her 2012 show at Galerie Marion Scharmann in Cologne, she presented a modest collection of Perspex strips leaning against the wall, whose only colour came from the paint she had applied to the edges. This exploration of light, transparency, surface, and colour was condensed even further in her series of works titled *Unusual Patient* (2012) in which oversized

Nights at The Circus, or Another Book I Didn't Read, 2008
Diverse materials, dimensions variable
Installation view, Next Visit, Berlin
Photo: Peggy Franck



light bulbs were suspended from the ceiling on long electric cables, where the curved glass of the bulbs was daubed with acrylic spray- and house-paint.

Following this reduction down to the bare essentials of painting – light, surface, paint – objects disappeared almost entirely from Franck's work for a short period. Her 2012 exhibition at Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam defied expectations of her work by presenting visitors with a stripped down,



Sudden Parallels Between The Sky
And The Concrete, 2012
Diverse materials, dimensions variable
Installation view, Galerie Fons Welters,
Amsterdam
Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

spartan installation. Titled *Sudden Parallels Between The Sky And The Concrete*, it was a conceptual recreation of her Berlin studio. In the centre of the gallery floor, wooden parquet replicated the shape and surface of her studio, onto which she placed a roll of turquoise acrylic film, weighed down by two stones. Curled like a snake in another corner of the parquet was a black electric cable and an oversized light bulb, which was half-mirrored (rather than painted by the artist). On the four surrounding walls, Franck pinned forty sheets, each measuring 50 x 70 cm, at evenly spaced intervals. At a glance, these all appeared to be mirrored paper, painted with a mixture of acrylic, spray-paint, gouache and ink, in thin washes of colour. However, interspersed between such paintings – whose reflective surface revealed also the colour and forms of the gallery space and the floor piece – were identically-sized photographs of such sheets of painted and mirrored paper, which Franck had taken while they were

Reading And Being Read To, 2011
Perspex, gouache, acrylic paint,
640 x 1500 cm
Installation view, Zabłudowicz Collection,
London
Photo: Peggy Franck



installed in her studio. In these, the blurred reflections of her studio were visible behind the painted shapes, with its worktable, toolboxes, and stepladder. Thus described, the piece may sound like a self-referential prism, turning in on itself and its place of creation, but the effect was surprisingly open and generous, a spatial exploration of the intersection between painting, installation, and photography. As Rosa Juno Streekstra wrote of the work: "Instead of extending two-dimensional pictures into space like she has done before, [Franck] now subtly absorbs space into flatness."

And so we arrive back to the beginning, to the painterly (perhaps even Greenbergian) flatness of *A Shift In Focus*. The history of modern painting has been shaped by successive shifts in focus, enabling us to look at the world in new ways, whether formally, optically or socially. Over a much longer period, the notion of the shape-shifter has played a central

role in human imagination, as traced through art, mythology and folklore. Whether intentionally assuming the guise of some other being for mischievous purposes, being transformed against their will as a form of punishment, or adopting a new shape as a means of escape, shape-shifting allows characters to act in ways that were previously impossible. For an artist, shape-shifting is inherent to the creative process, as ideas and materials are transformed by the intervention of the artist, in whatever form that intervention may take, be it physical, contextual, or purely conceptual. Having sketched the outlines of her practice over the past six years, it will be exciting to see what shape Peggy Franck will adopt next in the protean development of her practice, and what will it enable her to do.

Zoë Gray

- Born in 1978, Peggy Franck lives in Amsterdam.
- www.publicnature.nl

A Cat Had Got Up
and Left The Room, 2012
Diverse materials, dimensions variable
Installation view, Marion Scharmann, Cologne
Photo: Peggy Franck