

Igor Zabel
SOLD WORKS

Upon first, superficial glance, Nika Špan's exhibition, »Sold Works«, seems to be a kind of spatial painting. Some visitors indeed took it to be a formalistic abstract composition, a kind of geometrical abstract painting extended into an environment. Such an erroneous understanding is, of course, a result of a lack of attention, but it also indicates some aspects of the installation which are not unimportant and are connected to the more essential issues of the show.

One could say that the installation displays a particular aestheticism, i.e. a harmonic colour and spatial composition and a perfection of execution (all characteristics which could be understood as typical of painting). The feeling that we are dealing with a formalistic work could also be supported by the systematic approach evident in the show. Both characteristics, however, should be understood as signs of something else rather than as self-sufficient, autonomous qualities. This is clearly confirmed by other elements in the show and, at first glance, could be understood simply as a kind of heterogeneous addition; a projection of the artist's back, documents, the monotonous music played by the artist on an electric guitar and then taped during her opening performance. These elements can only be connected meaningfully within a whole if we understand the installation as something which is not merely present and material, but as something that indicates other spatial and temporal dimensions. This transgression of presence actually discloses some of the most essential aspects of the show.

If we talk about the dualism of the present and the absent at this exhibition we have to keep in mind that a gallery is not just any space. Traditionally, it is the space of art, essentially separated from everyday life. This distance, this shift into the arena of aesthetic contemplation (which art can never completely erase, if it is indeed art) however, does not necessarily mean that the everyday world has been abandoned. Rather it is the opposite; the distance enables a certain demonstrative, ostensive, enlightening relationship with the world. Through artistic practice and its implicit distance, one can step out of the immediacy of everyday life, view the world in a new way and re-appropriate it.

The »Sold Works« exhibition makes use of this very dualism. The exhibited documents prove that, while painting the gallery, the artist actually replicated the work she had done in the everyday, non-artistic world, where she was a professional decorator as a means of survival. The autonomous colour combinations are signs of an analogous activity within a totally different social context.

Formally seen, the artist's activity (painting the walls) remains the same in both cases. This analogy, however, functions as a sort of a screen or mirror surface. Through it, both contexts, which determine the actual meaning of this

practice, mirror each other. Work as compulsion and creativity as freedom; physical activity as inevitable effort and body art as decoration of everyday space and autonomous visual composition. The detached world of the gallery and the concrete world of 'normal' rooms are in a relationship of mutual mirroring and disclosing. It is this mutual relationship which is essential to »Sold Works«. The installation in the gallery discloses a practical activity as a possible work of art and, by the same token, itself enters actual social relationships and itself becomes work connected with survival and payment. It is this relationship, I believe, which enables us to enter the real space of Nika Špan's project.

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