

CAMPOLI PRESTI

Press release

Heike-Karin Föll

blushing

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Heike-Karin Föll's work recalibrates the artistic endeavours of painting, drawing, and writing, and her show *blushing* locates this rebalancing act in our very present: the year 2020, as digital technology makes itself felt in our lifeworld ever more strongly, and as a pandemic is reshaping our realities. Think of this artistic recalibrating activity – by way of the show's title *blushing* – as a reaction, a change in hue, the becoming more intense of a shade in certain spots, at the expense of other parts of the body. The consistency and application of the perennial make-up that is *la peinture* (as Morisot, Manet, and Baudelaire knew) must change.

One central question of *blushing* is what, under today's circumstances, the small format on the wall can become? – There is, presented in the gallery's library, a plan in images and writing for the show, a form reminiscent of cinematic practice – a storyboard. These works on paper also echo the experimental rearrangement of letters and pictures on the pages of historical avant-garde journals. And there is the installation *my brain*, in which standardized A4 paper forms the basis of artistic operations of drawing, applying colour, xeroxing, printing, sketching, and taking notes. These individual pages are displayed on the wall where they evoke both: the medium on which the artist thinks, practices, and has put herself to work – the leaf; while also giving us the impression of a set of digital folders arranged on a computer's desktop. Both conjoined forming an image of artistic work in our present: production on paper and on the screen.

It has been observed by critics and historians of art, literature and media that small forms hold up particularly well to mounting pressures: under duress, in times of crises and upheavals, the small form – the short story, the clip, the drawing, or the anecdote – offer a compactness and an economy of means that allows for smooth transmission, quoting, sharing, etc. When the pandemic engulfed our world, some were reminded of one of the primary scenes of cultural production in the West: The story goes that the novella was invented by a group of friends withdrawing to a secluded estate to escape from plague-ridden Florence. There, they told each other short stories in the evenings. Thus was born the novella: a small format robust enough to withstand and thrive in pandemic times

In *blushing*, Föll expands her work with small formats to encompass both canvas and painter's cardboard. While retaining the small dimension, these have acquired a new solidity: thicker than paper, when placed on the walls they can seem like tiles: elements of quasi-architectural cladding; but also those 'tiles' that we have become accustomed to seeing on our screens, holding meetings, seminars, and all sorts of digital gatherings through software such as zoom. Reconsidered from our recently increasingly digitized lifeworld-interfaces, the media-historical trajectory once plausibly suggested by art historian Anne Friedberg – the 'Window – From Alberti to Microsoft' – seems to have both shattered and solidified. Rather than 'a window' the screen, to which Föll's work return, is a desktop of folders, a mosaic of tiles. We have reached another moment in which the picture-surface ceases to be conceived as a transparent zone, offering a view into an imaginary 'beyond'; rather it presents itself as a concrete, now hyper-flat arena on which folders are stacked, images appear, data is stored. A new recourse to that moment in the history of painting, once described by Leo Steinberg apropos American mid 20th century painting, in which what seemed transparent became the 'flatbed picture plane': now an informational desktop.

The show also encompasses a number of large formats: there is the array of movements of the brush that traverses and punctuates those canvases, swishing, as it were, across, as seen in the 'scratch series': modifications of that basic gesture of painting – the brush stroke – as per our movements on the smartphone's display – swiping left, or swiping right, tapping a finger on the screen. Against the compactness and conciseness of the small format the artist's larger canvases now even more clearly than before articulate a less dominant, even light, loose and at times fragile mode of organisation.

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Colours are powdery: the shades and forms on *Constructivist Bow*, perhaps, at one point, might have been rich, but now pale. *Untitled (fashion)* has a pastel quality, *magnetic* takes on the air of a watercolour. Large scale no longer automatically equals authority and needs to be rethought. - A face blushes, a shade of rose intensifies, calling for some additional powder here and there, doing its unmitigated work elsewhere.

- Philipp Ekardt

Heike-Karin Föll (b. 1967) lives and works in Berlin. She recently had a major solo exhibition at KunstWerke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2019). Past exhibitions include Centre d'Art Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2018); Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (2016); Mumok, Vienna (2016); Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland (2014); The National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen (2014); National Museum, Tbilisi (2014); Museum of Contemporary Art, Basel (solo exhibition 2012) and Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland (2011). The artist is currently a Professor for Drawing and Critical Digitality at Berlin University of the Arts (Universität der Künste Berlin, UdK).