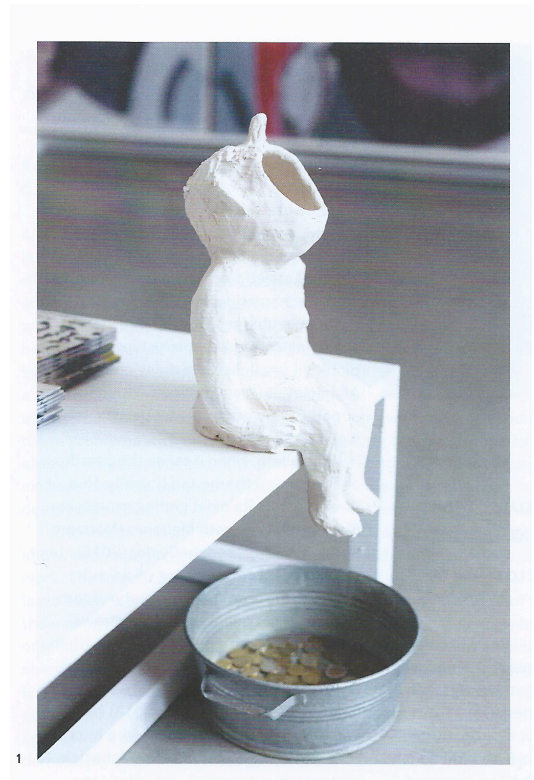


GERMANY

Amy Sillman

PORTIKUS, FRANKFURT

The title of Amy Sillman's solo show at Portikus, 'the ALL-OVER', manifests itself in the main installation, *Panorama* (2015–16), a procession of 24 panels of paintings unfolding along the walls. Walking around them, they seem to transition smoothly from one to another, like a sequence of frames in a film. Each canvas is ink-jet printed with blown-up, bulky black lines and blocks, which Sillman has painted over in muted layers of gouache and ink in shades of grey, violet and rose. While the colours structure the shapes on the surface of the canvas, in some places they also literally seep into the body of each panel. Printed graphic elements challenge gestural ones, and vice-versa. As if Sillman has constantly revised or wiped out her decisions in favour of other ideas, the traces of her thinking coalesce on the canvas, revealing fragile forms apparently stuck in the constant process of their own remaking. If, initially, the works appear to adopt the rhetoric of 'serious' abstraction, on contemplation, echoes of human-like figures emerge. A leg, a sulky mouth or a long nose seems to extend out of one composition and stretch into the next.



All of these large canvas panels rest side-by-side on a white shelf positioned close to the floor. Instead of presenting the works as revered trophies (the usual approach to exhibiting a mature painting practice), this display puts them on an equal footing with the viewer, or like a selection of mundane objects casually resting against the wall in your living room. Walking alongside them, it's tempting to assemble a narrative montage. But the essential element that never fully surfaces is the story itself, which Sillman often ensures is hard to pin down in her individual paintings. Here, the narrative instead appears in a separate video work, tellingly titled *Kick the Bucket (loop for Portikus)* (2016) – a one-minute digital animation made with an iPad. What feels like an enigmatic sense of time, material and shape in the panels takes the form of explicit slices: cartoonish silhouettes filled with visual references from *Panorama* flicker in and out of the projection. The frames are overlaid with the sounds of twittering birds and frantic scribbling, stressing the speed of their making. A bus runs over a dog. A figure bites somebody's head off. A skeleton runs out of a door and gets hit by a bucket. A woman with a machete appears and – literally – kicks the bucket. The slight bitterness in the scenes (based loosely on an actual class trip the artist took with her students), woven together with Sillman's sometimes-inverted idiomatic phrases, becomes physical comedy on repeat. This marriage of slapstick and puns recurs in a ceramic sculpture on a table in the middle of the room. An open-mouthed, coin-bank manikin waits to be fed euros, only to shit them out into a bucket on the floor. In return, the visitor gets one of Sillman's concertina-like

zine editions (*O.G. #10*, 2016), printed on both sides with poems and cutouts of the panels, re-imagining their continuous state of flux.

Sillman's work intentionally traps itself in the binaries of the literal and the metaphoric, the tragic and the comic, the abstract and the figurative. In the case of the coin bank and the animation, the artist draws us into an encounter with the work then hits us with a barrage of punchlines – running gags that run the risk of becoming obsolete if told too often. The joke's point has to be sought out in the panels. Animated by invisible impetuses, it is not the figures themselves that matter in Sillman's paintings but, rather, their ambiguous hovering between figuration and abstraction. They float between being almost present and almost absent, prompting a kind of anxiety – a longing for a missing object as the cause of a subject's desire.

ELISA R. LINN

1

Amy Sillman, *O.G. #10* (detail),
2016, artist zine, ceramic figure,
coin bank, dimensions variable

2

Amy Sillman, 'the ALL-OVER'
exhibition view