

frieze

Notes on Neo-Camp

Office Baroque Gallery

For all the sexuality in 'Notes on Neo-Camp' – from posing musclemen to busty women, from anal gags to feather dusters rammed where the sun don't shine – the exhibition had an air of glacial calm dominated by a decorative, almost frosty aestheticism. Curated by Chris Sharp, it followed an essay of the same name published in *Kaleidoscope* last year, in which he identified a handful of male artists who might be exploring camp as a 'heritage' style, this show fleshed out a broader concept of neo-camp gleaned in the work of a decidedly urbane set of 13 artists of both sexes.

One almost slid into the gallery down the angled peaks of Tom Burr's *Blue. Period. (TOUCH ME)* (2008), which registered as both a reclining body and a piece of furniture. Indeed, Burr's domestication and subversive sexualization of Minimalism is an appropriate entry point into the work of the other artists here, most of whom come from a younger generation. Sharp arranged the works in a manner that subtly suggested a series of domestic spaces, mirroring the housebound qualities of several pieces that snuck subversion indoors, such as Ricky Swallow's small patinated bronzes of household items which have become twirly and curlicued and a thus a little 'off', or Paul Lee's *Towel panel corner (red, pink)* (2010), which mines the prissy associations between pastel pink and housework. It's notable that the artists' gender might be read as part of the work in this context, as with Mathew Cerletty's *Snooze* (2012), a seductively decorative painting of a floral wallpaper pattern in polite shades of grey and yellow – as though a Jackson Pollock had been cut to size, made to prettify itself and behave.

Sharp's conception of neo-camp involves a process of 'resublimation' – that is, a campness that has become domesticated, heavily coded and veiled, a retreat to shelter after a period of 20th-century desublimation following the advances of psychoanalysis, gains in human rights and, more recently, an increase in confessionals in the public arena via various forms of media. As far as the work is concerned, the temporary triumph of style over content is often displayed, as in Matthew Brannon's poster advertising a movie titled 'In Through the Out Door', which makes innuendo after innuendo about anal sex and features a black hole as its central motif, but has been designed to appear perfectly

About this review

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'Notes on Neo-Camp', 2013,
installation view, foreground:
Anthea Hamilton, *Karl Lagerfeld
Bean Counter*, 2012, mixed media,
112 x 190 x 60cm

[Back to the main site](#)

OFFICE BAROQUE

polite and stylish. On a different tack, Ella Kruglyanskaya's painting *Nautical Bathers* (2012) is a riot of bulging breasts and buttocks, sailor hats and chains, but one almost misses the bodies in the excess of visual information, as though they might be absorbed into the pattern of a Versace scarf. Martin Soto Climent's ribald sculpture *Yet to be titled* (2013) offers a rather straightforwardly sexual form of comical camp: a pair of black tights stuffed with cushiony material that bulged out of the waistband in a kind of cleft. Into this cleft a bright orange feather duster has been rudely shoved.

Foodstuffs and the role of the housewife played a significant role in several of the works, particularly those contributed by women. Anthea Hamilton's *Karl Lagerfeld Bean Counter* (2012), a sculpture featuring a life-sized black and white image of a young and surprisingly hairy-chested Karl posing seductively, around which are arranged potatoes and a pile of buckwheat – as though the young designer is presenting a fibre-filled, wholesome sexuality from the past. Also offering edibles was Camilla Wills's florid digital photocollage *Mescaline Hostess* (2013), a pattern of prawn cocktail canapés that gamely suggested a 1980s housewife slipping guests hallucinogenic drugs as an aperitif. Allison Katz's *Poires Noires Sand Painting* (2009) – black pears rendered in different shades of sand on the gallery floor – prods at dark or damaged forms of eroticism. Bad pears; bad forms of desire.

Typified by quietness (no sound, performance or audio-visual material here), neo-camp can be considered in direct relation to its flipside – the extreme camp or the 'zany', as Sianne Ngai named it in her recent book *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012), of which Ryan Trecartin's screeching hyperactivity is the most prevalent example. Whilst zaniness is overstimulated and overstressed, neo-camp forms something of a retreat. Central to Ngai's ideas is Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882), which casts women as performers who act out an illusion of serenity. 'When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and to long for their happiness and seclusion: women.' The performance carried out by several of the artists here, in 'quiet' media, might thus be a reflection of the 'surf of plans and projects' that gathers around men and women alike, and an acknowledgement of serenity as a stylistic illusion from the past that still stimulates hunger and desire.

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