

AFTERTASTE

The Wall Gallery | Berlin, Germany



Aftertaste,” at Berlin’s newly opened Wall Gallery (through January 24), can be interpreted in at least two ways. The term can refer to what remains after the tongue’s taste receptors have been activated, or, in Pierre Bourdieu’s more political metaphor, to those morsels of aesthetic appreciation tied to class or regimes of domination, but now surviving only as inert, ironic remnants. Both these meanings float interchangeably on the surface of this exhibition, in which four artists—Matthew Rose (U.S./Paris), Sunna Wathen (U.K./Iceland), Lisa Salamandra (U.S./France) and Nancy Jones (U.S./Berlin)—are charged with

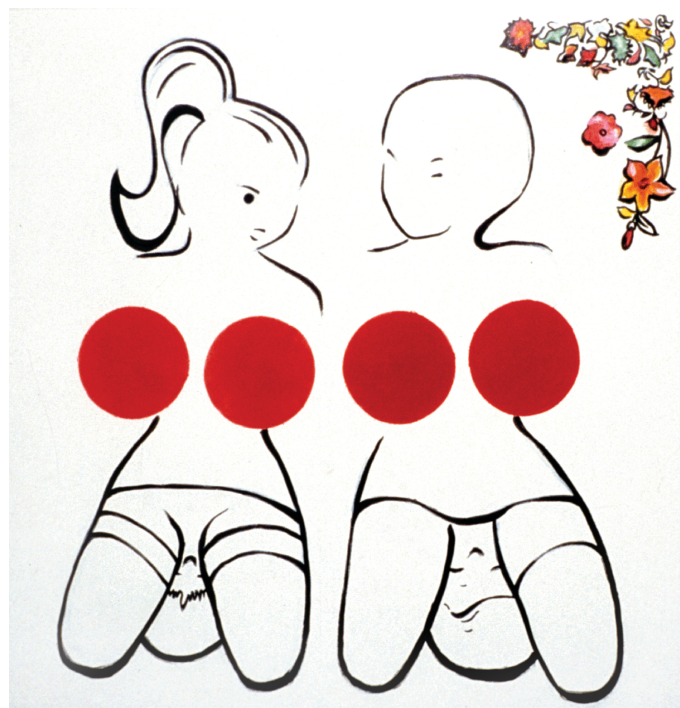
exploring “sensuality, consumption, and transformation.”

Rose adds a surreal twist to 1950s pop advertisements, showing, among other things, a housewife or tire salesman with their heads replaced with carrots and a bottle cap, respectively. Looking remarkably like a Neutral Milk Hotel cover design, Rose’s images redirect our sometimes frustrated expectations of a promised appearance to the announcements themselves, deferring desire to a “second coming” that never actually arrives.

Wathen and Salamandra both extend the meaning of bread far beyond ordinary consumption. In *Breadcornermountain* (2008), Wathen piles the remains of countless loaves into a corner, turning them into a useless Jacob’s ladder. Salamandra’s *Daily Bread* series (2001-ongoing) dispenses with the food item altogether, turning her old bread wrappings into watercolor and ink montages which in no way attempt to hide their mundane origins. By refusing to dispense with the use value of this staple commodity, these two artists foreground the shadow of exchange value that lingers long after bread has been drained of substance.

Similarly, Jones’s cartoon-like, mainly black-and-white renderings draw close to the treatment of women as commodities, yet absolve themselves of further comment at the same time. *Bluebird* (all work 2004) shows a woman sitting on a man’s face, hiking up her dress to make things go more swimmingly. Her face is completely hidden by her hair, while the only dash of color is a bluebird looking down on the couple from a nearby branch. Two girls receive the same favor in *Girls*, with red dots covering their breasts, while in *Phone Girl* a solitary siren crosses her legs around a phone cord. In *Bubbles*, another Bambi bimbo seems duly excited by her explosive bottle of bubbly. These images are doubtless ads, but exactly what for remains unclear. As Jones points out, “While women may consistently be depicted or viewed in vulnerable poses, the pursuit of a flat, cartoon-like, or simplified image can end up rendering the abstraction harmless.” Indubitably, the payoff never comes without a bitter aftertaste.

—Brian Willems



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) MATTHEW ROSE, *LES BOTTLES*, 2008, INSTALLATION VIEW. SUNNA WATHEN, *BREADCORNERMOUNTAIN*, 2008, INSTALLATION DETAIL. NANCY JONES, *Girls*, 2004, ENAMEL ON WOOD PANEL,

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