

Chang, Chris. "Five Points with Simone Subal", Art in America, April 2015. (Online)



Five Points With Simone Subal

by Chris Chang



View of Florian Meisenberg's exhibition "Delivery to the following recipients failed permanently," 2015, at Simone Subal Gallery, New York.



When you enter Florian Meisenberg's exhibition at Simone Subal Gallery (through Apr. 12) on the Lower East Side, you might feel a bit disoriented. The show's title accentuates that sensation: "Delivery to the following recipients failed permanently." "Everything in the show is slightly off," says Subal. "Deliberately." A not-exactly-rectangular triptych painting measuring 8 by 21 feet hangs on one wall; it's subtly perspectival and obliquely refers to gaming. A few faint stains were made by the artist applying his buttocks coated with linseed oil to the canvas—perhaps a ghostly nod to Yves Klein. On the gallery floor

Meisenberg painted a partial section of a tennis court. The "players" are two video projections that face each other from opposite ends of the long room. The two projections depict computer-animated images of undulating black blobs in space, hovering in front of changing graphic backdrops that reference Classical architecture. All of the projected imagery is continuously downloaded live from open-source databases (Meisenberg often works with the "screen"—both virtually and as a material). At intervals buoyant Platonic 3-D forms appear, only to be enveloped (or digested) by the globules. The various sketch-like objects appear in shapes such as furniture, containers, architectural fragments or abstract geometries. At one point I'm pretty sure I saw a

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birthday cake. Deformed plastic chairs, scattered around the room, further complicate the installation. Subal spoke with *A.i.A.* about her gallery program in person, graciously, in her space.

1) What can you tell me about the chairs?

Some people think they're made with a 3-D printer, but they're not. Florian rented a small U-Haul and then went to Home Depot. He packed the truck with the plastic lawn chairs and then drove to an industrial oven we found in New Jersey. Through trial and error—he had to discard a few pieces—he got the results he wanted. The oven owners thought we were crazy. I think of the chairs like spectators. They're individuals—they can't be stacked neatly together anymore. A few are having a conversation. Chatting. One pair is flirting. Sometimes the blobs and the objects on the screens are flirting. One chair, wilting alone in the corner, is obviously depressed.

2) Do you believe in auteur theory?

Authorship is an important idea—especially with Florian's show. He uses and explores invisible collaboration. The live stream, the open-source content, the databases, the algorithms and programs all disregard but also play with authorship in a really interesting way. Anti-authorship can become a theme.

3) Can there be an auteur theory of Simone Subal?

Yes. But it's very important for me to maintain a certain openness and looseness with the gallery roster. I do think an interest in more minimal or processed-based work defines the heart of my program, as well as a lot of time-based imagery. Five of my artists explore temporality in their work.

Paula Cooper is a major influence. She was the reason I moved to New York from Vienna. After a few years working at her gallery, starting at the front desk and then moving to sales, I went to the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. When I graduated I initially wanted to curate, but I chanced upon an opportunity with Peter Blum that turned out to be great for me. I opened my gallery in October 2011 with a show by Julien Bismuth. It was a week after my son's first birthday.

4) I hesitate to use this word, but throughout your various exhibitions I've noticed a certain theatricality. Installations often feel like stages or sets or the aftermath of a performance.

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I prefer *performativity*. That's definitely true. I have 12 artists now. Two are older; one of them, Kiki Kogelnik, passed away in 1997. Brian O'Doherty is 86. His work, a conceptual text-based practice, relates to performativity, but also to what I think is another defining point in my program: a strong interest in language—like with Bismuth or Frank Heath. I like the idea of immediacy: the triangular situation between the space, the viewer and the artwork; the way you move through an exhibition. Installing the show is the point where I am most excited and where I learn the most. When I think everything's in place the first thing I do is walk out the door and come back in. And then make adjustments. Every inch counts.

5) So Kogelnik would be the one artist that violates auteur theory?

I suppose she's outside the theory. She came to the United States from Austria in the early 1960s and moved in Pop art circles with people like Oldenberg and Warhol. She embraced certain components of the city and was such a fascinating figure. I think there's something so important, so prescient about her work. Having Brian and Kiki in the gallery is very important to me. I get a lot of energy from them. For instance, I have an idea for a show that would pair Kiki with one of my youngest artists, B. Ingrid Olson [born 1987]. Each of them deals in a way with the performative body. So maybe Kiki is part of the theory after all?