

Maja Vukoje. Auf Kante | On the Edge

Belvedere 21 / Vienna , 8 December 2020 — 29 August 2021

Curated by Luisa Ziaja

Maja Vukoje's work interweaves topics related to our globalized world with current discourses in painting. For this exhibition—her most comprehensive solo show to date—the artist has created a site-specific installation in the Belvedere 21 pavilion.

“Maja Vukoje has developed a distinctive artistic language across various bodies of work. Her paintings reflect the sense and the sensuality of this medium, and are simultaneously alluring and challenging,” said CEO Stella Rollig.

Maja Vukoje examines the mingling and merging of elements from different cultures in various ways. The artist engages with questions like: What do materials such as burlap and products like sugar, coffee, and cocoa tell us about economics and power in a globalized world? How does this relate to modernist abstract painting's claim to autonomy? And what approaches are now being pursued by painting in order to reflect itself, its history, and its multiple interrelationships?

In her exhibition, tropical fruits and other trade goods with colonial associations encounter symbols of our digitized daily lives and the surveillance of our bodies, while motifs from popular culture meet iconic works of abstract painting. Through her motifs, her unusual materials and artistic processes, the artist emphasizes the crossing of media boundaries. She has used rough and unprimed burlap as her supports since 2014. Maja Vukoje explores the qualities of materials and different levels of meaning by experimenting with the technical processes of painting. In one work series she uses sugar, coffee, or cocoa both as a subject and a material in the painting.

One striking body of works shows half-peeled fruit or vegetables, like an avocado, orange or sweet potato, depicted with a strong sense of three-dimensional illusionism. These monumental compositions that focus on an individual object call to mind a portrait. Vukoje's gestural application and removal of paint draw out the tactile qualities of the fruits' surfaces, peel, and flesh.

In a series of large-scale painted collages, motifs from different eras and cultures encounter objects from the present day: Neolithic masks meet underwear and a flipflop, or sanitary products like toilet paper and disinfectant—items charged with meaning in the current pandemic. As everyday



Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna © Bildrecht, Vienna 2020

things they tell of social coexistence and also of the relations and dependencies between humanity and nature, as well as humanity and technology.

The painter Josef Albers's iconic series *Homage to the Square* is an important reference for Maja Vukoje. This body of work explores how the effect of pure colors depends on their combinations and relative proportions within the same composition of a gradually enlarging sequence of squares. Vukoje alludes to this composition not only in the previously mentioned works that use sugar, coffee, and cocoa as paint but also in her site-specific intervention for the exhibition at the Belvedere 21 called *Nach Albers* (After Albers). Located on the upper floor of the Karl Schwanzer Pavilion—a classic example of Austrian postwar modernism—it comprises industrially dyed panels of burlap in a specific arrangement within the structure of the inner façade. The result is a vibrant interplay of light and shadow, color and materiality that focuses our gaze on the qualities of this open-plan space. From the Arsenalstrasse and the Schweizergarten, passersby can see the installation when it gets dark, transforming it into a signal to the world outside.

“Maja Vukoje’s paintings are colorful, beguiling, sometimes bewildering, they quote things we know from our everyday lives or from the art museum, they challenge our perception but also our attitudes. Above all, they reveal her virtuosity as a painter who reflects on and experimentally probes the possibilities of what a painting can be today,” said curator Luisa Ziaja.

Featuring over one hundred works, the exhibition presents the most comprehensive insight into the artist’s work to date. The hanging is not arranged by chronology or theme but makes associations by interweaving bodies of work from the last decade with her most recent art.

In 2020 Maja Vukoje was awarded the City of Vienna’s Prize for Fine Art.



Photo: Studio Maja Vukoje







Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna © Bildrecht, Vienna 2020



Albersburg, 2017
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
60 x 60 cm

Installation view "Maja Vukoje. Auf Kant | On the Edge", Belvedere 21, Vienna 2020—2021





Ethiopian Cube, 2020
Acrylic, cocoa, sugar, coffee on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm



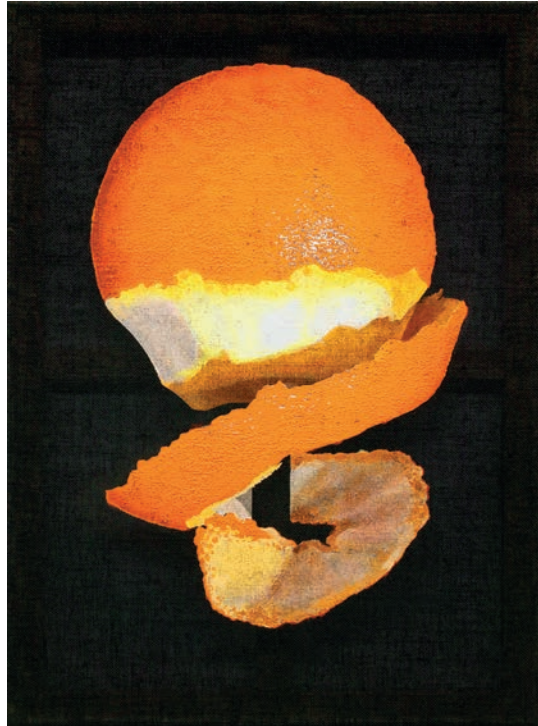
Installation view "Maja Vukoje. Auf Kant | On the Edge", Belvedere 21, Vienna 2020—2021

Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna © Bildrecht, Vienna 2020









Orange, 2017
Acrylic on burlap
100 x 70 cm



Installation view "Maja Vukoje. Auf Kant | On the Edge", Belvedere 21, Vienna 2020—2021

Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna © Bildrecht, Vienna 2020



Fist, 2012
Acrylic on burlap
40 x 40 cm

Fist, 2012
Acrylic on burlap
40 x 40 cm

Inconspicuous at first glance, two small-format paintings that Maja Vukoje made in 2012 exhibit several basic creative choices that would prove programmatic for the artist's subsequent oeuvre. An amorphous shape looms in each of it, white on black ground in the one, black on white ground in the other. In both works, it is difficult to make out the object that appears on the support medium's surface – or rather, that would seem to become manifest not so much “on” as “behind” the medium and partially penetrate it. That medium is coarsely woven burlap, whose translucent quality allows the square stretcher frame and its shadow on the wall behind it to show through. The white or black acrylic paint was applied to the back of the fabric and pressed into it so forcefully in places that areas of solid color have formed on the front, obscuring the warp and weft of the burlap. The two works' shared title, *Fist*, helps us identify their motifs. They indeed show the artist's raised fist, once “en face,” once in profile. There is something spectral and otherworldly about the latter picture, prompting associations with shadow theater, the play of hands in front of a source of light. In the former work, by contrast, the foreshortening of perspective and the curdled paint endow the fist that is coming directly toward us with a menacing physical presence.

The austere motifs and the sparing use of compositional and formal means, whose radicalism is without precedent in Maja Vukoje's oeuvre, signal a new rigor in her engagement with painting as a representational medium while also anticipating key decisions of the following years. It is the first time that she works on unprimed industrially manufactured burlap, the material that, together with burlap bags she cuts open, will be the only support medium in her work from 2014 on. In another first, Vukoje explores the medium's potential as a permeable membrane, applying the paint to the back to achieve novel surface effects that, unlike in the conventional painterly process, are not entirely under her control. Also new is the elimination of any illusionistic representation or even mere insinuation of a spatial setting in which the motif is embedded; the raised fist appears as a solitaire, extended not in an imagined third dimension but in the real physical space between the picture's back and its face. It is difficult to conceive of a subject that would be more apt to underscore the flat tableau's expansion into the third dimension than the artist's clenched fist pushing through the burlap.

The combative gesture, which has historically been a key element of the iconography of anti-fascist resistance, can seem like a piece of vacuous and formulaic symbolism, though some of those who adopt it today lend it new energy and meaning. The philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, in his anthropology of gestures of insurrection, has analyzed it as an expression of transgressive desire:

The “body of Liberty” is not only a representation, it is also a gesture of antagonism, presence, or “presentation,” including its moments of public appearance that we so nicely call, in French, *manifestations*. [...] For in *to manifest*, there are first of all hands [*mains*], soon arms themselves and entire bodies. *Manifestus*, in Latin, is the individual who is “taken by the hand,” meaning: “to be caught red-handed” or “caught in the act.” It is the visible transgressor of the social rule, the *manifestatio*

thus designating all that appears [s'expose], all that is risked – according to the double meaning of appearing and taking a risk, indeed of the crime of transgression – in a visible way, “manifest” or transgressive, as the forceful defying of order. To manifest will thus be to have desired to proclaim one’s desire and, now, to disobey in acts or, rather, in concrete gestures. [...] To manifest would be thus to get a handle on desire”: to transform loss into uprising, the immobility of depression into a flowing movement, paralysing fright into sovereign progression, into a gesture of emancipation.²



In Vukoje’s paintings, where the gesture is presumably intended in a less straightforwardly political sense, it aims at the specific conditions in which she works and the economic, social, and aesthetic interrelationships that inform her art: the raised fist penetrating the support medium lets her address the apparatus of visual production, representation, and value-coding in order to tease out the “collective shadow,”³ the collective unconscious of painting itself. In the following pages, the tropes of shadow and threshold, transition and transgression will guide me in my attempt to gain a better understanding of individual works and bodies of work by Maja Vukoje as well as the visual grammar of her art more generally.

Shadows and Thresholds – Eccentric Gestures of Transgression

The glittering purple piece of attire in *Glove* (2010) looks like it was flung over an empty picture frame; the strong shadow it casts lends it such sculptural definition that one is tempted to reach for it. But perhaps it is nothing more than a thick layer of glitter pigment, gray acrylic paint, and three pieces of light-yellow adhesive strip on a white-primed canvas? Such destabilization of perception, or delusion, is a familiar phenomenon in art, known as *trompe l’oeil*, French for “deceive the eye.” The deception lies in the fact that the beholder takes the object of pictorial representation, what the picture shows, to be physical reality. In this respect, it is part of the tradition of mimetic representation; but, one might say, it is not content with the representational function and instead creates the illusion of a reality *sui generis*.

[...]

Luisa Ziaja: Painterly Illusions and Gestures That Transgress Them. In: Stella Rollig, Luisa Ziaja (ed.), Maja Vukoje. *On the Edge*, Belvedere 21, Vienna. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne 2020, pp193-203, here pp193-194

Glove, 2010
Acrylic, glitter, adhesive tape on canvas
40 x 30 cm



[...]

G.E.A.K. (2011) is obviously a far more complex painting; Vukoje's largest work to date – it is 26 feet wide – it incorporates an entire web of references and internal and external concatenations. Yet despite the disparity, it may be read as a companion piece to *Fist*, synthesizing central themes of her work and strands of her practice in a monumental format. The painting shows the windowed storefront of the “[Ge]sellschaft für Energie-Arbeit und Kunst[t],” or “[So]ciety for Energy Work and Ar[t],” which operated out of premises in the immediate vicinity of the artist's studio in Vienna's 20 th district until a few years ago, when it had to make way for a construction project. With almost hyperrealistic accuracy, the façade of the low-slung building, a strip of sidewalk with a manhole cover, and a bus stop sign are rendered in their actual dimensions. The full-size depiction is a key prerequisite of trompe l'oeil painting, allowing the image to graft itself into the space of the beholder. The effect is heightened by bold cast shadows that suggest bright sunlight striking the scene from the right and, in the area of the large windows, evoke an ingenious and intentionally mystifying play with transparency and opacity, reflection and absorption. With the exception of the window on the far left and the glass entrance door, the room behind the objects on display is screened

off by a white net curtain and mid-blue drapes. A piece of the perforated board that serves as the rear wall of the display can be made out on the left, whereas the premises behind the entrance door lie in darkness; the door itself, however, is labeled with a piece of (real) white paper, with a telephone number printed on it in green numerals.

Working from a photograph of the original scene, Vukoje faithfully reproduced the architectural and interior design details but then replaced the objects in the windows with a fresh selection.

[...]

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G.E.A.K., 2011
Acrylic, color plot, color copy, paper, sand on canvas
300 x 800 cm

FLAMBOYANT TRANSPARENCY

Işin ÖnoI

[...]

Transparency

Inside and outside are not abandoned to their geometrical opposition. From what overflow of a ramified interior does the substance of being run, does the outside call? Isn't the exterior an old intimacy lost in the shadow of memory?⁶

Ever since her early works, Vukoje has explored the notion of transparency in the form of pictorial representations: Throughout her earlier paintings she developed a repertoire of strategies to mimic transparency, allowing her to juxtapose images and create multilayered, ambivalent narratives. Later, this inquiry evolved into more physical investigations and into the actual occurrence of transparency. In the course of this research process, Vukoje started experimenting with linen and burlap, initially using their material properties and later also their intangible implications.

The works produced between 2011 and 2013 primarily used linen instead of primed canvas. These works explored the potential of mimicking light rays, as if they were penetrating the canvas from behind. In *LUX D'OR* (2011), a glamorous plethora of chandeliers is shown in contrast to the worn-out floor of the store that offers them. This work celebrates the dazzling effect that is achieved by creating the illusion of light piercing the surface of the painting from behind toward the eye of the observer. *Billboard* (2011) takes this idea one step further: Here, the bare linen becomes the object in the foreground of the painting (the billboard), as opposed to merely serving as a substrate, and the painted light rays seemingly emanate from behind the area where the bare linen is exposed. The landscape behind the billboard is not visible, and the advertisement that would otherwise be shown on the billboard is absent. The surface, in the image of the billboard, stands between the painting and the audience. The canvas, which otherwise is neither the work nor outside the work, becomes a substantial element of the image, whereas some subtle drops of paint mimic glimpses at a background that is blocked by the canvas. So, which layer can be regarded as the foreground and which the background of the painting? What is shown, and what is obfuscated? What is the subject, and what the substrate? In Vukoje's work, these playful techniques are always interwoven with the subject matter of the painting and never fully repeat themselves: Each time, these effects and techniques are used to different ends and in different ways,

and thus form words of an artistic vocabulary that is used to formulate later work.

[...]

Işin ÖnoI: Flamboyant Transparency. In: Stella Rollig, Luisa Ziaja (ed.), Maja Vukoje. On the Edge, Belvedere 21, Vienna. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne 2020, pp215-223, here pp217-218

6 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1994), p.



Billboard, 2011
Acrylic on linen
200 x 250 cm



LUX D'OR, 2011
Acrylic, color photoplot, textile, leaf metal on linen
200 x 130 cm



Science, 2012
Acrylic on linen
200 x 180 cm



Linen, 2012
Acrylic on linen
200 x 160 cm



Leo, 2016
Bleach on burlap
485 x 245 cm

[...]

In subsequent experiments with burlap, Vukoje starts to create an image by subtracting pigment from burlap using bleach, rather than by adding new pigment (by depositing paint). In revealing deeper layers of the material, Maja Vukoje returns to her childlike, superficially simple yet strikingly complex drawings (see Leo, 2016).

This is a consequence of this process of subtractive painting: The action of the bleach is delayed, so the artist draws blindly and then has to wait for the image to become visible through the chemical process of bleaching pigments in the substrate. To some degree, the artist has to relinquish control to the deep material memory of the burlap and simply accept what it chooses to reveal. In so doing, the burlap becomes both a tangible messenger of political and historical relations and also a layered, partially transparent, many-faceted actor in an arena of physio-symbolic interactions that we refer to as a painting that is being looked at in a room.

[...]

Işin Önol: Flamboyant Transparency. In: Stella Rollig, Luisa Ziaja (ed.), Maja Vukoje. On the Edge, Belvedere 21, Vienna. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne 2020, pp215-223, here p220



Trombones, 2016
Bleach on burlap
510 x 670 cm

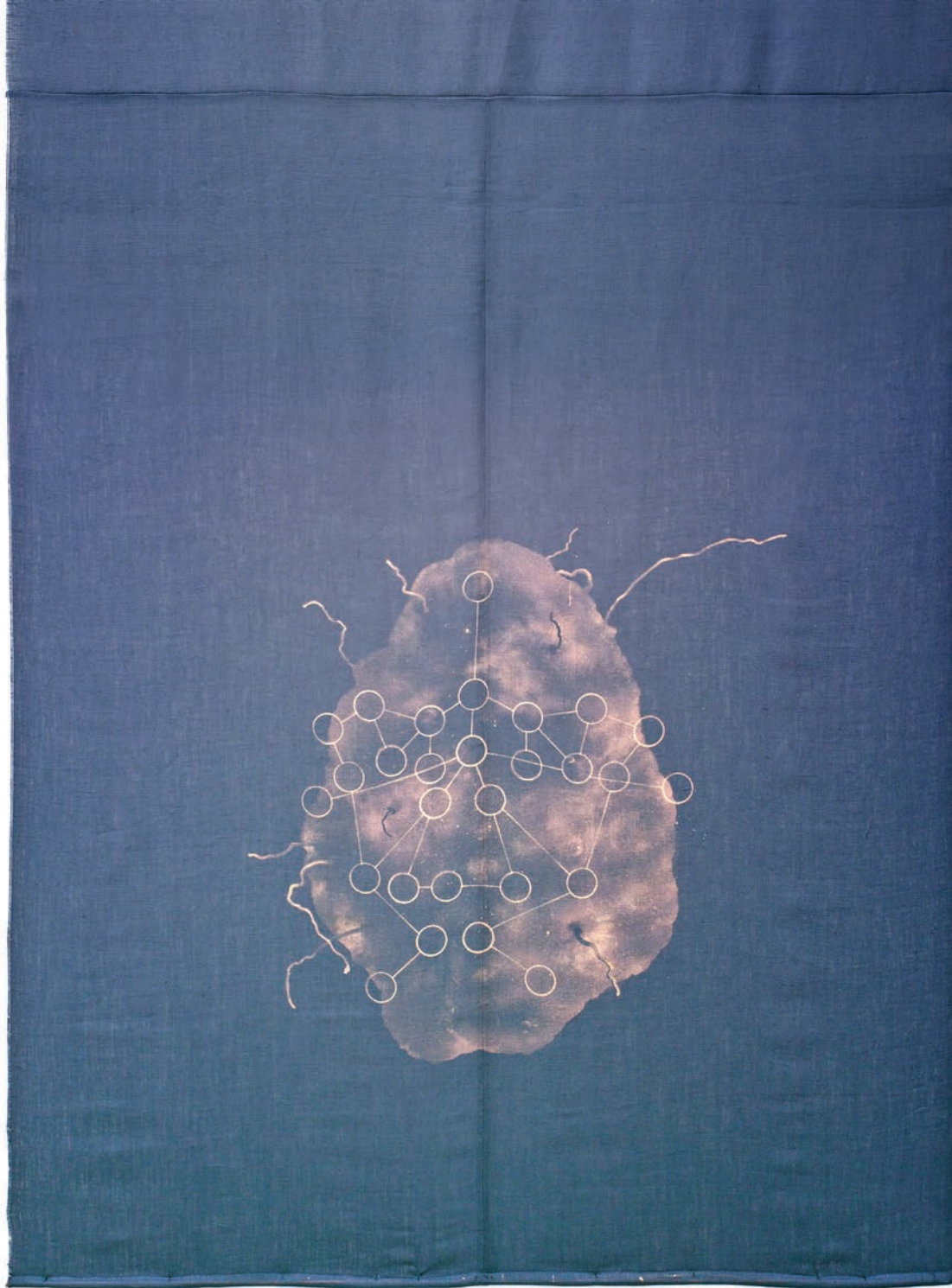


Nach Anna Atkins (*Alaria esculenta*), 2014
Bleach on burlap
70 x 50 cm

Nach Anna Atkins (*Laminaria digitata*), 2014
Bleach on burlap
70 x 50 cm



Poppies, 2016/20
Bleach on burlap
450 x 250 cm



Grumpara iD, 2018/20
Bleach on burlap
430 x 250 cm



Patata, 2013
Acrylic, mini CD on burlap
210 x 180 cm

Hanged and Skewered – Subjectivized Objects

The “Scarecrows,” a series that Maja Vukoje has worked on since 2013, melds the play of shadows, thresholds, and gestures of transgression with the desire to furnish the two-dimensional panel painting with a spatial dimension beyond mere illusionism. On the basis of the choices of painterly technique sketched above and taking inspiration from Paul Klee’s work *Scarecrow* (1935) in the collection of the mumok, Vienna, she experiments with “bodies” composed of heterogeneous elements. Klee’s *Scarecrow* is one in a series of so-called “square paintings”; a red circle represents the head; four red lines, the limbs; and an oversized brown square, the torso. Given Vukoje’s longstanding interest in objects with anthropomorphic features, which is reflected in earlier works, she was bound to be fascinated by the potential of this simple composition of abstract forms; created in response to the rise of National Socialism, it also carries unmistakable political connotations. Klee’s horizontal-lines-as-arms may have given her the idea of expanding the pictorial surface into the third dimension by using the crossbars of the stretcher frame, which can just be made out behind the translucent burlap fabric, as a central element of the pictorial construction, a rack on which the figures seem to hang. The latter are composed of painted and found objects, which are always drawn from diverse historical, cultural, aesthetic, and functional contexts. Their combination is deliberately noncausal and unforeseen, yielding avatar-like hybrid creatures that balance precariously between subjectivity and objecthood, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality.

[...]

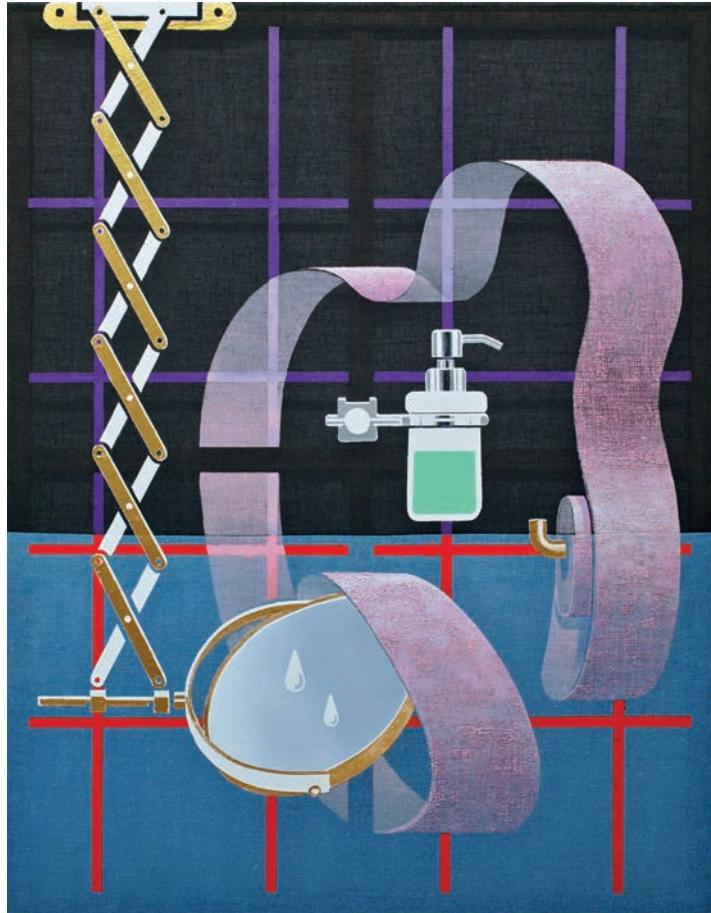
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Memo Lisa, 2015
Acrylic, pencil, brush bristles, newspaper on burlap
200 x 110 cm



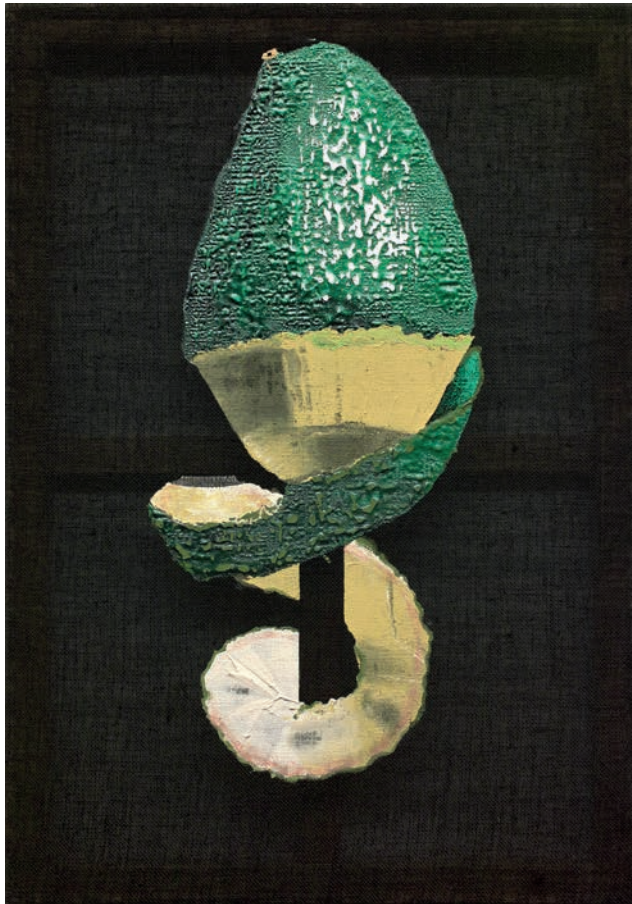
Untitled, 2013
Acrylic on burlap
180 x 140 cm



SPA 3, 2020
Acrylic on burlap
180 x 140 cm



Sun RA, 2015
Acrylic, leaf metal, quartz sand, ash, coffee sand on burlap
180 x 140 cm



Avocado, 2015
Acrylic on burlap
100 x 70 cm

[...]

Most basically, Vukoje's "Scarecrows" with their surreal-looking configurations as hanged hybrid objects tell stories of the migration of form through times and spaces, of the construction of identities and the ideological exploitation of history; but also of new relationships between humans and objects that augur a further dismantling of barriers, and of the subjectivation of objects hovering uncertainly between activity and passivity. In their solitary monumentality, the skewered fruits and vegetables are no less portrait-like than the "Scarecrows," though the inner tensions that bring them to life arise not from the heterogeneity of the motifs and subjects being sampled but from the simultaneity of different states of an object, rendered in bravura performances of diverse painterly techniques and processes (Avocado, 2015). The sculptural solidity, fleshy physicality, and tactile allure of these objects invoke structures of visual desire in which the pleasure of seeing can take on overtones of voyeurism, even obscene carnality. To see how, compare the representation of naked (female) skin in the history of art, in particular in conjunction with the exoticizing gaze upon the so-called other in Orientalism.¹⁴ Vukoje's "exotic" fruits all originate in the Global South, which is to say, they are merchandise circulating in postcolonial economies; reaching Europe from distant shores, they are stamped by the inequality ingrained in global relationships of dependency. They are the objects, one might say, of a transposed Orientalism familiar from seventeenth-century Netherlandish still lifes. Vukoje now appropriates that Orientalism in order to literally expose the mechanisms of the projection of the exotic, just as the works discussed above exposed the constructed nature of the pictorial illusion.

[...]

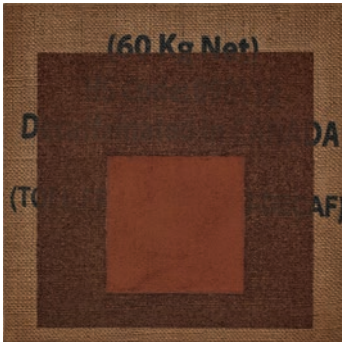
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Pitahaya, 2017
Acrylic, color melt granulate on burlap
130 x 80 cm



Mango, 2015
Acrylic on burlap
100 x 80 cm



Alberqusac, 2019
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

Alberscanada, 2019
Coffee, cocoa on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

Alberspratapereira, 2020
Acrylic, sugar, coffee on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

[...]

Metaphorical Substances – Performative Materialities

In another extensive series of works begun in 2015, Vukoje turns to globally traded products such as coffee, cocoa, and sugar, which are steeped in the history of colonial exploitation and its present-day continuities, as both subjects and media of painting. Aiming for maximum redundancy, she collapses the interactions between form, content, and material: in *Würfel* (2016), for example, a sugar cube is depicted using sugar as pigment on a cut-open burlap bag that originally served to ship sugar. A material that is alien to painting imparts a metaphorical charge to the cube – a motif that is properly speaking abstract (if we think of modernist geometric abstraction) – so that the picture ceases to be about pure form and instead speaks to the economic, social, and aesthetic contexts that are bound up with the printed burlap bag and the sugar crystals. In this manner, Vukoje to some extent suspends conventional logics of pictorial representation – or rather, transcends them, as when the hue of the monumental abstracted shape of a coffee bean on a burlap shipping bag for Brazilian coffee is not imitated (which is to say, represented) by coffee-colored paint but actually *consists* of powdered coffee with its characteristic fragrance and tactile qualities (*Bohne*, 2017, → p. 46). Vukoje samples this coincidence of material and signification in numerous variations and combinations of the abovementioned substances in several “aggregate states,” each of which comes with its own colors, consistencies, and surface qualities (including raw cane sugar, unrefined, semirefined, and refined sugar, granulated, ground, and brewed coffee, granulated cocoa, cocoa powder, et cetera).

The artist also harnesses these same qualities in a series that appropriates Josef Albers’s iconic composition *Homage to the Square*. For almost three decades, Albers made a close study of the varying effect of pure colors depending on their combinations and relative proportions in works based on an unchanging basic compositional structure: a series of nested squares on a panel of the same format. Vukoje quotes this structure but works in sugar, coffee, and cocoa on cutopen burlap bags that retain their original stenciled labeling. The titles are always compounded of “Albers-” and an element of the label such as a geographical reference, as in *Albersburg* (2017) or *Albershonduras* (2020, → p. 88). Where Albers – true to the postulate of the abstract painting’s claim to autonomy – is concerned with the self-referential interplay between solid unmixed color and surface, Vukoje’s interpretation reads as a critical homage to the homage, plunging it into multiple complex geographical, material, social, and economic realities. She performs an irreversible displacement or translocation that, as Chris Sharp has persuasively argued, results in a transitive painting, to quote the key term in David Joselit’s conception of a “painting beside itself,” a seminal contribution to the contemporary discourse.¹⁵ Transition and, yes, the transgression that has been a leitmotif in these pages: these are hallmarks of the art of Maja Vukoje, whose “apparently simple and yet complex approach to contemporary painting,” as Sharp notes, “offers a compelling way forward for the specific medium that is painting.”¹⁶

[...]

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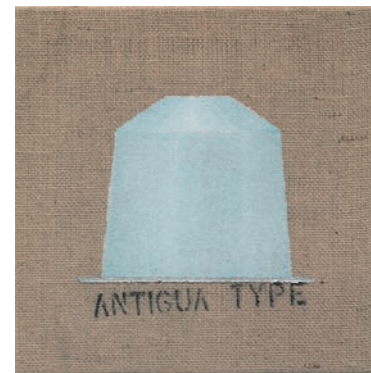
Albershonduras, 2020
Acrylic, sugar, coffee on burlap sack
60 x 60 cm

Albers9, 2019
Acrylic, cocoa, sugar on burlap sack
60 x 60 cm

Albersgreen, 2019
Acrylic, coffee, cocoa, sugar on burlap sack
60 x 60 cm



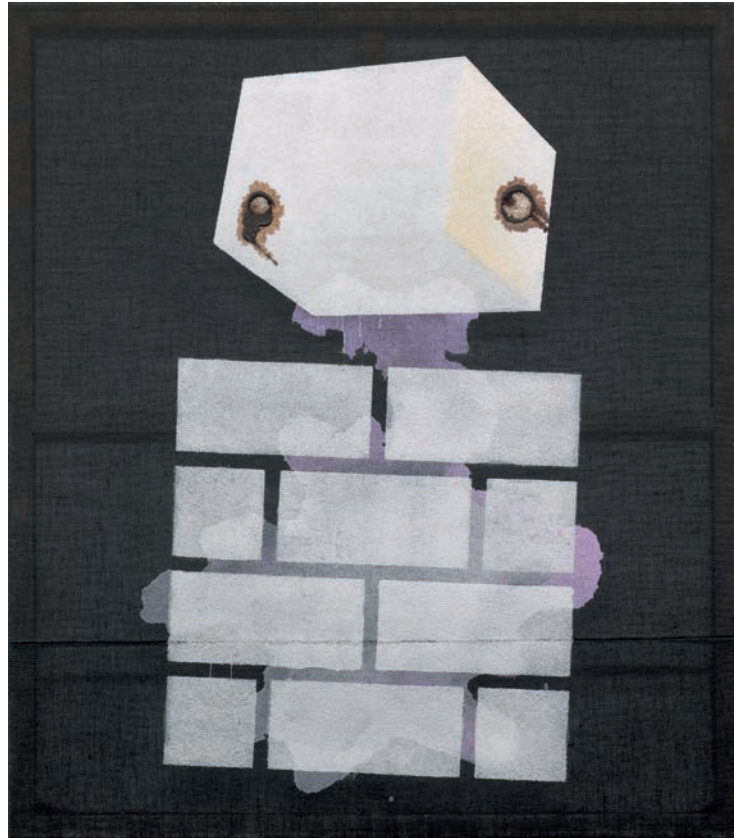
Bohne, 2017
Acrylic, coffee on burlap sack
170 x 130 cm



Qusac Lungo, 2019
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

Antigua Type, 2017
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

Deflazonato, 2017
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
120 x 65 cm



Fomogotchi, 2017
Acrylic, sugar, coffee on burlap
160 x 140 cm



merci, 2017
Acrylic, leaf metal on burlap sack
120 x 65 cm



Smokey and Bunty, 2016
Acrylic, ink, terracotta powder on burlap
180 x 140 cm



Würfel, 2016
Acrylic, sugar on burlap sack
50 x 50 cm

Maja Vukoje's semi-autonomous paintings

Chris Sharp

The work of Maja Vukoje has evolved gradually and succinctly from large, complex figurative tableaux, reminiscent of the genre of history painting, to works of considerable simplicity, in which a single figure or motif is liable to occupy the ground of an entire painting. And yet for all their simplicity, her paintings have only broadened in terms of conceptual, thematic, and sociopolitical complexity, while pushing the debate of painting forward.

Indeed, Vukoje's recent works address some of the most urgent debates surrounding painting over the past few years, from claims of "Painting Beside Itself," as per David Joselit, to related issues of "semi-autonomy,"—a term I confess to having never entirely grasped until encountering these particular works. I would, and will argue that Vukoje's paintings propose one of the most clear and compelling demonstrations of *semi-autonomy* I have ever encountered.

But first of all, what are they? Painted primarily on burlap, Vukoje's paintings consist primarily of images that occupy the center of her canvas. Her subject matter ranges from fashion to artifact to materials goods and food stuffs to the history of abstraction itself. Motifs are applied in flat, collage-like form, superimposed upon another, on the surface of the canvas, and as such, are almost always devoid of space. Whether the imagery is composed of touristic tchotchkes and kitsch, such as in the painting *Smokey and Bunty* (2016)—a broken Greek vase above what looks like a leopard or some kind of animal skin pattern and aviator sun glasses—or pieces of fruit or, say, popsicles, it is all highly mediated.

Nothing here yearns for, or makes any claim toward originality, but instead, continually foregrounds the fact that it has already been seen somewhere else, be it in a photo, on line, in some type of ad for a product, or even in a shop somewhere; the images smack of déjà-vu to the point of fetishizing it. In this respect, their pared-down debt to Pop art as a visual strategy is undeniable. More specifically, when it comes to foodstuffs, images of foodstuffs are painted on the burlap bag in which they were transported (a sugar cube on a bag of sugar, or a coffee bean on a burlap bag used to transport coffee). The writing and logos originally printed on the bag (and painted over by the artist) tell us as much.

This language becomes especially interesting when considered vis-à-vis the language of Pop art advertisements—which is also appropriated—in that these are essentially the ingredients, as it were, of Pop art. What I mean is that this is quite literally the stuff of which it is composed. Thus, to a certain degree, these paintings could be seen as a post-colonial deconstruction of Pop art. Indeed, if the rise of the latter historically paralleled the end of the colonial project, then these works parallel and embody the post-colonial as a paradigm in that they analytically reflect the origins of these goods, as opposed to taking these origins for granted.

[...]

Chris Sharp: Maja Vukoje's semi-autonomous paintings. In: Sandro Droschl (ed.), MAJA VUKOJE_fuels_n' frumps. Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna, 2018, pp37-39, here p37



Photo: Markus Krottendorfer

Maja Vukoje. *fuels ,n' frumps*

Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst und Medien (KM-), Graz, 2017

04. February — 02. April 2017

Curated by Sandro Droschl

With Maja Vukoje, the Künstlerhaus is presenting one of Austria's most essential artists, who occupies an outstanding position in the field of painting. Her solo exhibition provides an overview of her production during the past five years, as her work has increasingly manifested a genuine painterly vocabulary. The artist has created about a dozen new paintings for the show, which will be on display with selected existing pieces in the upper atrium galleries of the Künstlerhaus. To accompany this extensive exhibition, the Künstlerhaus will devote a new publication to Vukoje. Vukoje's paintings are based on her exploration of political themes such as post-colonialism, gender, and pop culture. Vukoje's approach is founded on more than just her own migrant experience—she also travels to specific places in order to examine certain cultural phenomena. She then takes the resulting mixture of realities and translates them into a complex, yet easily accessible visual language. For her latest works, she's chosen a rather analytical approach toward the process of questioning representation. With its subject of the "Vogelscheuche" (Paul Klee, 1935; "scarecrow"), the exhibition's title metaphorically alludes to traditional genre depictions of bodies and the objects surrounding them, while the artist—in these politically confusing times—presents for debate their internal states, materials, and the forces that drive and fuel them. Vukoje's solo show provides an overview of what she's produced in the past five years, which increasingly allows us to recognize a genuine, painterly language.

Installation view "Maja Vukoje. *fuels 'n' frumps*", Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst und Medien (KM-), Graz, 2017









details



