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Christian Theiss | Shapeshifter

21 Oct - 25 Nov 2023

Alien entities sit on sterile stretchers. Laid out and exposed, their skin shimmers in iridescent patterns, they squirm, lurk, stare. On a converted sushi belt, a parade of polymorphic creatures takes endless rounds. From distinctly left traces of human influence to structures far beyond anything earthly - oscillating in their seriality between manufactory and cabinets of curiosities, they incorporate a liminal field of references and analogies. It is this imaginative scope that distinguishes the ceramic works of Christian Theiss. When merged with meticulously perfected craftsmanship, it creates a body of work that initially defies definition and yet, because of its supposed strangeness, seems vaguely familiar.

Like swarms, the creatures populate the gallery space and its architecture. They occupy almost every free spot, provoking questions about their origins and their purpose. They have a king - a creator who continuously shapes from the most widely variant sources of inspiration. The home, the kitchen that doubles as a workshop, the potter's wheel and the artist's hands thus become incubators for beings and polymorphous silhouettes between fantasy, popular culture and myth. On tables, cupboards and shelves, groups of creatures gather, waiting like ingredients in a large kitchen or a cool chamber to be processed by the skilled hands of an itimae or an artist to finally make their grand entrance.

But what happens when they multiply uncontrollably and become residents, nesting deeper and deeper in all niches of life? Their predefined path becomes slippery, their supposedly predetermined life cycle obsolete. Retreating into every free corner of their surroundings, including - inevitably - the most private spaces of their producer, privacy becomes an illusion, infested with one's own imagination and its excesses.

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Shapeshifter re-enacts this path; its exhibition architecture becomes a space-time construct that tells the story of the creation and manufacturing processes of its inhabitants in various stations, room by room. As viewers, we take the reverse route from showroom to warehouse to intimate production facility. In the process, intersections become visible that otherwise usually remain hidden: intersections between process and presentation, imagination and execution, and between privacy and the public sphere.

Partly amorphous and ambiguous, partly figurative, the creatures thus become more than just physical forms. Through assemblages of diverse sources of inspiration, they lead back to Theiss' artistic roots and yet far beyond. Inspired by ancient mythology and Asian folklore, they are reminiscent of supernatural Yokai or cultically charged objects - and themselves become modern totems between reality and imagination.

Lena Albers