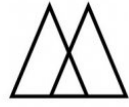


# METRO PICTURES

Fitzpatrick, Chris. "Nina Beier 'Cash for Gold' at Kunstverein in Hamburg," *MousseMagazine.it* (July 11, 2015).



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**Chris Fitzpatrick** Your solo exhibition at Kunstverein in Hamburg comprises several series which have been spread throughout the space, mixing them together. What this does is emphasize the continuity and development of those series, as one issue or concern is picked up and stretched out from one series to another. Was that the intent with the exhibition?

**Nina Beier** We tried to make sense of the relationships between my works, especially the way each piece becomes a manifestation of developing or sometimes stagnating concerns in my work.

**CF** When I think of stagnation I see still water. Your practice is maybe more that of an irrigator's, or at least someone who pours specific amounts of water into crystal wine glasses and then plays sound by making the rim resonate with her finger. In that sense, your exhibition in Hamburg seems more like the structure of a fugue.

**NB** That is a much more poetic comparison! And I suppose that recurring melody can be pretty irritating. Anyway, it became apparent how I keep circling around a confusion between image and object in material that sits between the portrait and the portrayed. The most concrete example of this is perhaps the pressed domestic palm trees I use in *Greens*, where the plant sacrifices its life to become its own image. Or the human hair wigs, which I think are already images in that they are frozen in a hairstyle that will never grow. But as well as being an image of hair, they are of course still actual hair.



**CF** I wonder if it is really an image of hair. Dead people still grow fingernails for a while, so I am just wondering if these flattened things are in some sort of undead mode, in the sense that even a stopped clock is correct twice a day.

**NB** That is exactly the attraction, a material like that cannot escape its own reality and will always be caught in an in-between place. But I think the self-contained object/image relation, and the odd sense of independence I found in this status, brought me towards a fascination with authorless images devoid of intention. Looking at different tropes of free-floating images, free from the burden of message, I find a space for scrutinizing the reality of the image, like any other object, its production and circulation, all the things it cannot escape from representing. I just made sculptures using the world's largest seed, the coco-fesse. The plant is threatened with extinction and is now protected, because its seeds' resemblance to a woman's womb made them highly attractive to humans as collector's items. So somehow the object projects such a strong image of fertility that it has been standing in the way of its own actual fruition.

**CF** Maybe the reason the "assiness" of those coconuts is deemed important enough that the seeds would be so protected shows how inundated we are by an anthropocentric hierarchy.

**NB** If a palm tree grows a female nude, does that make it an artist? Or if a woman lets her hair be harvested, does that make her a field? A handmade rug is traded at a value referencing the labor hours invested in its making; human hair wigs are also testaments of human time, a crop which grows 12 cm per year. A Marxist understanding of value would be tied to the accumulation of time. Time manifested in goods and the determination of value bound to the time needed to produce a specific object. Today, of course, the relation between time and value is rarely connected to blood, sweat and tears, but then again we still value the idea of it.

**CF** Why Rocky's sweat and not, I don't know, Jean Claude Van Damme's?



**NB** The premise for the Rocky movies is the same every time. Rocky is faced with some impossible challenge and through hard work he somehow manages to overcome this with a patch of sweat as an emblem on his chest. I like to think of these patches as paintings.

**CF** There are two other pools of sweat and tears, seeping out of two enormous basketball shoes in the other room. Who manufactures these solutions?

**NB** The artificial tears and synthetic sweat are produced by the pharmaceutical and textile industries. One as a guard against dry eyes, the other to test different fabrics' colorfastness and durability. Again, here we have representations of the most delicate human conditions conceived for the least sentimental purposes.

**CF** The title, "Cash for Gold," relates to the arbitrary representational value of currency: a metal assigned a value, an official paper assigned a value, both exchangeable.

**NB** Yes, representations in a complicated, on-and-off relationship.

**CF** This seems to play out most clearly in your work *Liquid Assets*. Can you explain how you came to hack this sculpture into pieces, and the economic implications and realities of this procedure?

**NB** I bought a life-size statue of a knight on a horse. When trying to negotiate the price, the antique dealer refused to go any lower since the price equaled the value of the material itself. The sculpture had been deemed worthless in the presence of the metal it was made of. So I cut away everything in the sculpture that didn't represent metal and was left with a wearable suit of armor.

**CF** Hermès?



**NB** There is an overwhelming array of very different images on Hermès ties, revealing a bit of a Eurocentric perspective of the world. The patterns depict humans and animals, nature and culture, farming and produce. In short, this is a domain where people, dirt and diamonds are presented as having equal status. The compositions have no foreground, middleground or background. The patterns do sometimes include images of the ground, but when it is present it appears as a figure, a defined object with a beginning and end, equal to any other pictorial element.

**CF** Objectif Exhibitions co-produced your “Ground” series. In presenting them, we discussed the dual nature of the thing and the representation of the thing being the same simultaneously and literally so. Also that they were an agglomeration of implied locations and times. The fact is, they are bases and supports and representations of bases and supports and representations of a base material: dirt, earth. Yet they are brass, which is earth, though fashioned to look like earth. Excretory core samples, and so on. Here, though, placed in close proximity to the hacked and mutilated knight and his horse, there is a hierarchical relation once the figure of the man is invoked, and then the figure of the tamed horse used by the man as a tool.

**NB** A statue of a man on a horse on a piece of ground is a straightforward representation of traditional ranking order. When the first two are taken away, we are looking at a pile of dirt. But then again, the ground means something different to us now from when these sculptures were made, as humans move ten times more soil around the planet than natural processes of erosion and weathering.



**CF** You also created a new series for this exhibition. Porcelain dogs and vases, paired at more or less the same size, though each produced in different countries with differing reputations for quality. Both the dogs and the vases have been altered to look like they've been chewed or bitten, by pirañas or barracudas more than by dogs. How did these come about?

**NB** Yes, the porcelain dogs are traditionally produced in Italy and the vases in China. There are a lot of differences between these two objects, one is functional and the other odd decor. But the dogs and vases share a number of properties: they are porcelain, hand-painted, the same size and they are hollow. I guess I borrowed a form of logic from cartoons, where there is no difference between the abilities of dogs and vases. When these objects start consuming each other, the three-dimensional painting that is the dog is revealed to be an empty surface, whereas the vase loses its function and becomes an image. Both of them disclose their empty inner anatomy and somehow meet, in between image and object.