

LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY

from: *BORDERS*, from 12th June to 12th September, 2014

Curated by Adam Carr

June 2014

## CURRENT CURATION / **BORDERS** From 12th June to 12th September 2014

CURATED BY:  
ADAM CARR



*BORDERS* looks at the concept of the border in the world at large and its links with the vocabulary of art making and the language of art – painting, sculpture, drawing, film and installation, as well as everything else in between these borders.

The exhibition takes its cue from the circumscribed nature in which it takes place and the means by which it is viewed. Curated for ARTUNER, an online platform viewed digitally, this exhibition asks whether such a context poses yet another border in which to discover and experience art, or whether it pushes out borders that already exist, particularly as it concerns the experience of an artwork in relation to its presentation.

Within the framework of the exhibition, the artworks being presented both point to what delineates a border and examine how a work of art can paradoxically both set up and break down boundaries. Some of the artworks created for the exhibition outwardly bypass the existing and traditional boundaries of spectatorship, while others set up borders to open out new readings of works by the other participating artists. In addition, ideas are questioned which lay at the heart of the context in which the exhibition takes place, namely issues of reproduction, mediation and access.

The structure of *BORDERS* also disrupts the normative framework of exhibitions and presentations, situating it between the borders that distinguish and characterise solo and group shows. Each week will bring a different artist and a new group of artworks will be introduced, with intermissions to be announced along the way. Accompanying this will be texts on the artists' works and interviews. These will sit in close relationship with each presentation, as the artist and artworks are spotlighted for an allotted duration of time before they become part of an overall exhibition.

Gabriele De Santis introduces works that mine the borders of language, art history and our perception. With his special brand of humour, they mix together art making and curatorial strategy, and make a concerted leap to escape beyond boundaries and conventions. Sol Calero's creations are similarly vibrant, but their content is distinctively different. While their ability to seduce seems to be their main mode of operation, and indeed their surfaces border on being undeniably compelling, they play with notions of representation, identity and marginalization, informed by her South American background and her own migration. Calero's askance and almost ironic stance on cultural content becomes heightened in the work of Dan Rees, specifically art history and established motifs. While some of his paintings in the exhibition point to work by other artists, particularly that of Daniel Buren, they escape outside the frame of his predecessors as well their frame of reference. His works in the exhibition read one context and transfer it to another.

Formal and conceptual elegance is also central to the work of Oliver Osborne, oscillating, as it does, between abstraction, found imagery and deadpan photorealism. His images, mostly taken from old European textbooks, generate an effect both surreal and familiar. They suggest a bygone era, though they remain deliberately difficult to pin down. In one work included in the show a character seems to slip outside of the picture, but the action remains internal, mirrored and repeated. The other, the arrest, implies a transgression, the crossing of a moral and social border.

Jonathan Monk's trio of pieces follows his characteristic approach to art-making where high and low meet, the past and present combine, and presence is replaced with absence and vice versa. Taking inspiration from Italian artist Alighiero e Boetti, two works reference Boetti's iconic series of works titled 'Mappa'. Monk's sculptures continue Boetti's evocation of geographical borders – what distinguishes the globe and our countries both physically and otherwise – but pits them up against today's reality. Against this backdrop, one piece by Monk is a shade for light, while his other uses light to mark its surface. In another work by the artist, a border or a frame is suggested, where the piece should ideally be hung to the right of something red and the left of something green or purple.

In a similar fashion, Nina Beier's pieces stake out another, physical, and her case architectural space, and play with the object in relation to their documentation and presentation. Equally, the work of James Clarkson meddles with surface and object, the external and internal. With the incisions and alterations he makes to his materials, Clarkson points to their origins while unearthing entirely new readings and possibilities. In a similar manner Alek O. transfers the familiar into new, uncharted territory. A parasol becomes a dog; a sweater becomes a monochrome. Her works sit in between the borders of painting and sculpture, and with paradoxical intent both show and conceal markings of their previous existence and treatment.

Brad Grievson also deals with the concept of transferal – from one area to the next and from one arena to another. Monochromatic, his paintings luxuriate in surface and detail. They remain still, and yet also appear to move outside of the boundary of the canvas, especially when considering their materiality and origin. Stephen Felton's practice entirely focuses in on borders. His paintings cast outlines, stripped, in their boldness, of any detail. They bring together a unique visual language that often traverses the canvas to include the stretcher and the floor. Cologne based artist David Ostrowski investigates how borders can be set up, expanded and finally abolished within abstract painting. His seemingly stochastic interventions with a spray can create tense delineations on the blank canvas.

(Adam Carr)

# ARTWORKS IN THIS CURATION



THE WORLD STAPLED TOGETHER, 2014  
JONATHAN MONK



THIS DRAWING..., 2014  
JONATHAN MONK



THE WORLD LIGHTBULB MOON LAMP,  
2014  
JONATHAN MONK



G, 2014  
OLIVER OSBORNE



UNTITLED (ARREST), 2014  
OLIVER OSBORNE



PINTURA DE FRUTAS III, 2014  
SOL CALERO



PINTURA DE FRUTAS II, 2014  
SOL CALERO



PINTURA DE FRUTAS I, 2014  
SOL CALERO



CAFFÈ MACCHIATO, 2014  
GABRIELE DE SANTIS



AS LONG AS YOU LOVE ME, 2014  
GABRIELE DE SANTIS



# ABOUT THE ARTWORK

## Pintura de Frutas I, 2014

Combining the gradually shifting tones of blue with a fluidity of black paint to denote playfully-rendered fruit, Sol Calero's *Pintura de Frutas I* explores how signs can undergo alterations in meaning and be used in differentiation to their original purpose.

Calero's painting enters into dialogue with the cultural atmosphere of 1930s Latin America. During this period there was an emergence of avant-garde art from the region. It combined the simplicity of lines and shapes with bold colours; aspects of which can clearly be distinguished in Calero's *Pintura de Frutas I*. Similar to the work of one of the pioneering abstract artists from the period, Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949), Calero does not completely eschew representation, although her images transform the meaning of her references.

The simple aesthetic of this painting and its embedded images is used to convey the importance of cultural signs and how icons can take on alternative meanings and significations from one society to another. *Pintura de Frutas I* references the abundance of fruit worn by the Brazilian dancer, Carmen Miranda. With her performative persona being (mis)appropriated by the North American government, Miranda became a symbol of the exotic beauty of Latin America. Yet this was an amnesic transformation of the original context of her costume, which was based on the destitute Baiana women who made their living selling the fruit.

The bright colouring and playful representation in Calero's image signposts the exaggerated connotations of Latin America as entertaining and light-hearted, with a disregard for the realities of poverty and strife found in the region. Calero's vacuous depiction of fruit, presented only through in outlines, indicates the potential for symbols to be appropriated and completely transformed in meaning.



# ABOUT THE ARTWORK

## Pintura de Frutas II, 2014

In this work Sol Calero presents a bustling smorgasbord of brightly outlined fruit, vegetables and other organic matter on a lightly graduated background, shifting from a pale green azure at the bottom of the canvas, to a sunnier, washed out orange at the top. The fruit subjects are rendered in a cartoonish manner. The depictions of bananas, pineapples, lemons and slices of watermelon are rudimentary, their different textures barely shown. Strangely, they resemble sweets, pared back to the basic signifiers.

Yet there is a beauty in this simplicity. The viewer recognises what he sees without question. In a way this work shares similarities with Matisse's cut out renderings of the palm fronds that surrounded him in the gardens of Southern France. Also similar to Matisse is the way in which this work straddles the border between art and decoration. Pintura de Frutas II appears almost like a wallpaper or fabric design, supported even more so by the so-called Tropicana aesthetic present in contemporary fashion.

The organic subject matter is an important reference to Calero's background as a South American. In a curation that examines borders, this work asks important questions about national identities. Whilst the brightly coloured fruit does reference a key part of Latin American culture, it is not all encompassing. Perhaps Calero is encouraging us to question how we view certain objects, adding a hidden depth of complexity to the present work. It is not just a collection of simplistically rendered fruit, but a painting that asks us to read between the lines, beneath the surface.



# ABOUT THE ARTWORK

## Pintura de Frutas III, 2014

In this work, Sol Calero intertwines the decorative with the historical. The vibrant fruit on the canvas undulate between flat and full-bodied marks. While the surface appears ornamental, the work has a deeper and more critical signification; Calero is concerned with the ambiguous function of cultural codes. Her work is part of a continual investigation into post-colonial modes of representation, specifically as they relate to the subjugation of Latin America through the lens of European and US popular culture.

Pale gradients mixed with fruit patterns have now become a fashion aesthetic. Hawaiian shirts and tropical regalia have entered into the vernacular of contemporary fashion. A vital precursor to this dress code was Carmen Miranda (1905-1955), who Calero often cites as a source of inspiration. Miranda was a Portuguese-Brazilian singer, dancer, and actor known for her exotic clothing and tropical accoutrements – with a particular emphasis on her fruit-filled hats. After achieving success as a performer in Brazil, her career was transplanted to the US. Once there, Hollywood producers pushed her to wear racially exaggerated costumes that stereotyped Latin American culture. For Calero, the embellishment and exoticisation of Miranda is worthy of re-examination. *Pintura de Frutas III* highlights foodstuffs and arabesques which personify the performer, possessing an almost toxic beauty.

This current work transposes a disassembled version of Miranda's famous headdress replete with saccharine fruit atop a gentle pastel spectrum. It recalls fauvist work, both in its exaggerated colour scheme, as well as the brush strokes that are both undisguised and spontaneous. Miranda's carefully coordinated outfit is imperfect; contours are discontinuous and ragged with fruit forms verging on unrecognisability. There is a purposeful disharmony; one that is simultaneously allegorical and provocative.