



As exhausting and exhilarating as any art event can be, Berlin Gallery Weekend 2017 ended last Sunday, April 30. For a couple of days, the German capital was filled by collectors being chauffeured around in glossy BMWs; fashionable youngsters who this year replaced their used tote bags with used fanny packs; dinners and cocktail receptions at stylish venues no real Berliner would ever set foot in; and discussions, debates, disagreements about which show was best, which was the worst, which surprised, disappointed, irritated, bored or satisfied the most. In fact there was a lot to discuss: thanks to the dynamics developed by Gallery Weekend over the years, spaces and galleries who aren't officially participating in it organize shows of equal, if not superior quality; those exhibitions end up being as much part of gallery weekend as Northern German weather and cheap beer.

So who focused on what? Both Symons, Pearmain, Lebon at Bortolozzi and Alex Heilbron at Ashley offered a reflection on femininity through scent. In the British trio's installation, monitors showed a very naked young woman sensually moving around a large bottle of perfume, with two voices—one French, one English—describing the components of the scent she was toying with in a tone both theatrical and clinical. The aesthetics of what appeared to be outtakes from an advertorial shoot were classic, almost banal; it looked like something Sophia Coppola could've done for Tom Ford, circa 2004. Yet, through the complete nakedness of the actress being shot—she reappears printed on wallpaper in another part of the show, her genitals clearly visible—the pseudo-raunchy aesthetics usually employed as marketing tactics are perverted and annihilated, actually redirecting thoughts to this, and possibly all women's sexual sovereignty within a culture of hyper-fast consumption and shallowness. Aesthetically very different yet equally successful in walking a fine line of clichés, Canadian painter Heilbron showed canvases reminding of retro fashion or children's book illustrations in powdery colors; with a specially commissioned scented candle, she underlined the tension between the classical codes of womanhood and the oppressing weight of idealized domesticity; parting the space with white veils added to an impression of dangerous softness that couldn't possibly be all good.

Great video work was on view all over the city. At Esther Schipper's newly inaugurated space, Anri Sala's work *Take Over* mesmerized the crowds. One could see hands playing the Marseillaise and the Internationale on a piano, the two melodies intertwining, dissonant or weirdly similar, the close-up of a pianist's hands reflected on large glass panels in the dark room; sound, architecture and moving image melted into one smooth yet tangy sensorial experience of which it was hard to let go. Equally captivating was Guan Xiao's trippy three-channel video *Dengue Dengue Dengue* on view at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, which mixed a large array of scenes, ranging from duck robots to Muslim men praying, with impactful and dramatic bits of text and sound. Dara Friedman's multichannel installation *DICHTER* at Supportico Lopez was also a highlight, with a multitude of videos, stacked above each other and running in an endless loop, showing actors reciting a poem of their choice with passion and emotion, creating tour à tour a cacophony of voices and moments of total clarity. In the group show *A New Prescription for Insomnia* at HORSEANDPONY Fine Arts, which was not part of the official program, Julia Colavita & Adam Chad Brody's piece *Gem Drug* (2015) successfully confused the viewer by alternating sensual images of faceless bodies ingesting vaguely organic substances with dreadful footage, such as jewellery being sold on QVC or the insides of an intestine, which weirdly enough triggered feelings of repulsion and fascination alike.

Lovers of painting were also rewarded. Van Hanos' works at Tanya Leighton seemed informed by an acidic pessimism; motives included the earth being smashed with a hammer by the moon (*Dark Side of the Moon*, 2017) or a business man in miniature sitting in a woman's lap (*Little Man*, 2017). Executed in a weirdly generic style, it was only after a while that the dark and precise humor of these paintings pierced through the impersonal mist they'd initially exuded, making them all the more creepy and successful. This tactic of visual harmlessness was also fruitfully used by Grace Weaver at Soy Capitan: her almost naive depictions of what appear to be millennials interacting with their digital devices or exercising in public spaces seem to reflect on generation X's dependency on aspirational aesthetics and its failure to reach any sort of satisfaction within an Instagram-driven bubble of neoliberal egomania. A very different approach to the medium seemed Brent Wadden's at Peres Project: here, abstract painting, realized by assembling handwoven weavings into semi-regular compositions, came across as refreshingly down-to-earth. Yet, aside from their obvious aesthetic appeal, Wadden's pieces made you think about art as labor, as a form of tangible productiveness, and somehow you could perceive the artist's body, his effort and work, within these beautiful patterns. Among a myriad of topically dense exhibitions, of which some tended towards sensationalism, his was certainly a highlight.

Labor and its somber implications were also a topic at Buchholz, where one had the privilege to admire some of Melvin Edwards' *Lynch Fragments*—wall pieces composed of tools, knives, pieces of machines and metal, melted together into dark and condensed semi-abstract evocations of brutality; the works on view, realized between 1986 and 2012, are part of a series the artist started in the 1960s as a response to racial violence in the United States; while small in scale, the effect and topicality of Edwards' pieces at Buchholz is intense and broad; it goes way beyond the fancy Charlottenburg apartment in which they are displayed, and stays with the viewer for quite some time. So did the readymades of Maximilian Schmoetzer at ROOM E-10 27 at CENTER (again, not part of the official program), through which the artist addressed the destruction of Palmyra by ISIS, its surrounding ecosystem and therefore, the fatal consequences of colonial and neo-colonial greed. Cheap plastic bags and Syrian stained glass were combined into objects looking like semi-destroyed shelters and powerfully evoking the hopelessness of this seemingly never-ending conflict. One day before May 1—a day that inevitably transforms the city into a boiling cauldron of political action and protest—it felt correct and necessary to see that both a veteran such as Edwards (*1937) and a young artist such as Schmoetzer (*1982) would keep on exploring and engaging with the political and controversial aspects of artistic practice; somehow, this makes particular sense in a city with such an immense role and adventurous fate within recent history.