

Manfred Naescher

Anecdotal Evidence of a Violet Takeover, 2013

Series of 8 Drawings, Watercolor on Paper, each 30 x 40 cm / 11.8 x 15.8 in

The following is an excerpt from an interview Kate Singleton conducted with Manfred Naescher in June 2013 on the occasion of his exhibiton *Anecdotal Evidence of a Violet Takeover* on Buy Some Damn Art, Singleton's online gallery. www.buysomedamnart.com

This series, like others of yours, is inspired by film stills. Why movies? Why Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette?

I use the history of art and popular culture, mostly cinema, as an archive of collective memory. Working with source imagery is an integral part of my practice, but I'm not interested in recreating images, or a before/after effect, or nostalgia. What I do is more like making new versions of manufactured imagery, new images that retain a certain - or maybe better yet, uncertain - connection to their source. If we look at the act of remembering as an act of image-making (in the sense of Deleuze's notion of perception as subtracting from an image what is unrelated to us) we are creating a new image every time we remember. Working with existing visual material provides a starting point, an actual image of which I then make another image - a process that closely mirrors the process of memory.

Marie Antoinette is a fascinating coming of age film. The complicated motifs of representation and identity, melancholy and joie-de-vivre, privilege and limitation are executed with an admirably light touch. I was attracted to using imagery from this film because of its two main layers of memory: Marie Antoinette is an interesting example of how human memory (Marie Antoinette's story) is embedded in the memory of history, this wider story that remains in the background for most of the film, and that takes over in the end. The film is also a visual feast of muted, pastel ambiance. When I gathered the source imagery for *Anecdotal Evidence of a Violet Takeover* I watched the film with the sound turned off. I really appreciate Sofia Coppola's way with sound and music, I thought using New Order's Ceremony for the trailer was a really effective idea. But then I realized the film works just as well, if not better, without any sound. It becomes a dreamy vision of Marie Antoinette drifting in this sea of washed-out color.

How do you get that gorgeous effect of really saturated, dynamic color in the background? It truly looks like silk!

That effect comes mostly from the strong contrast between the muted figures and shapes in the foreground and the much less diluted violet of the background. If it would be a full sheet of only that violet color, it wouldn't seem as striking. These two different treatments of color directly relate to the two layers of memory at play here, the ephemeral nature of what's depicted in the foreground and the amorphous, powerful forces of the background.

For *Anecdotal Evidence of a Violet Takeover* I used color as a means of evoking a feel of luxurious textures - silk, satin, velour, soft leather, not in a literal sense, more in terms of atmosphere - with a general softness and lightness in the foreground, and with Marie Antoinette, her accessories, her sweets, her diversions, lost in color.

Do you see yourself as a secondary storyteller, after the film's writer and/or director?

Not at all, I'm not even trying to tell stories. My pictures merely present fragments. A first and crucial fragmentation occurs when I take single images out of a film's context. The images are then fragmented even further by how I depict the frame's visual content, as I leave out most of the frame's inventory. In my work, more often than not, nearly all visual information that the filmmaker intended to put forth in the service of the film's narrative becomes obscured by watercolor. Having said that, there is a sort of storytelling aspect inherent to my work, but it's abstract and it's not so much me who tells the story, it's more the watercolor itself: As the medium is drying, a visual trajectory materializes through which the biography of the picture becomes legible: general directions, detours, tangents, highlights and lowlights become visible. Analogously to memory, there are distortions, shifts, additions, cessations, re-distributions, and levels of re-prioritising that occur in the emerging image.