

Karla Black

16th May – 16th August 2009

The migros museum für gegenwartskunst is presenting the work of Scottish artist Karla Black (born 1972 in Alexandria, lives and works in Glasgow) in her first solo exhibition in Switzerland. Plaster, chalk dust and Vaseline, or substances such as face powder, lipstick and nail varnish make up Black's raw materials. The ephemeral works – whether transparent cellophane arranged sculpturally to hang from the ceiling, or fragile works of gossamer-fine powder sprinkled onto the floor – present references to the Minimal Art and Conceptual Art of the 1960s and 1970s. Black simultaneously extends the classical notion of sculpture through a process-oriented, performative handling of cultural connotations and untypical materials. Not only does she create an oppositional model to the brute effect of Minimal Art, but through the use of unstable and simple substances she ties into the history of antiform, begun for instance by Robert Morris in his use of felt, or Eva Hesse in her deployment of latex.

Through their colours and materiality, Black's sculptural works create an extremely subtle effect. The surfaces of some of the objects can be recognised as rough cardboard or sensitively transparent cellophane, other areas are covered by gentle pastel colours. Breaks and cracks in the structural materials split through the layers of paint. Just a tiny movement could cause the paint to rip the paper, altering the sculpture. Black's fragile works are never in a stable condition as they are threatened by persistent decay. The artist seeks to interrupt this natural process in her works, and transform them to obtain a timeless condition as close to perfection as possible. This maintained sovereignty over the art permits the artist to assess the actual condition of the work according to aesthetic criteria and, not unlike a restorer, affect precisely targeted interventions to eliminate the traces of time. With various methods and materials, the artist probes for a more constant and unchanging condition for the work. Nonetheless, some sculptures have a lifespan only as long as the exhibition itself, after which they are destroyed. The sculptures' very properties necessitate that her work is produced on site. For Black, that the objects are site specific is a vital element of the work process. The creative process – completed in the opening of the exhibition – affects the work in a manner most present. The significance of this prescient performative element is supported by such poetic titles as *Pleasers Don't Decide* (2007) and *Mistakes Made Away From Home* (2006).

Although atypical materials like toothpaste, face powder and body lotion have an ostensibly immediate and slick effect, Black does not use them self referentially, for the sculptures do not engage purely with material aesthetics. The raw materials used stand not in opposition to, but are equal to classical sculptural materials such as marble or bronze. The household and cosmetic products involved are sometimes those used by the artist herself, and others are chosen purely for their colour and/or material qualities. In this way the artist plays with the relationship between subject and object. The works exhibit a strong minimalist drive, but the use of such obviously charged materials lends potency, simultaneously pointing to a contemporary iconography of materials. The works reveal a strong presence on the part of the artist herself, on the one hand through the materials used and on the other through the existing physical traces of her energy and her hand in the work.

Born in Scotland, Karla Black lives and works in Glasgow, where between 1995 and 1999 she obtained her BA in sculpture and in 2004 her Masters degree in Fine Art from the Glasgow School of Art. Alongside appearances in numerous exhibitions in Europe and the USA are those at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (2008), participation in the Brussels Biennial (2008), *Art Now* at Tate Britain, and the group exhibition *Poor Thing* (2007) at the Kunsthalle Basel.

Exhibition curator, Heike Munder.

CATALOGUE: on the occasion of the exhibition a monograph on the artist will be published in November 2009, as a result of a collaboration between the Kunstverein Hamburg, Modern Art Oxford, and Inverleith House, Edinburgh.

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS: Sunday 17th and 31st May, 14th and 28th June, 16th August at 3pm, as well as Thursday 4th June and 13th August at 6.30pm.

OPENING HOURS: Tues / Wed / Fri Midday-6pm, Thurs Midday-8pm Sat / Sun 11am-5pm. Entrance to the museum is free each Thursday between 5pm and 8pm.

BANK HOLIDAYS: The museum will be closed on Monday 1st June. On Thursday 21st May the museum will be open between 11pm and 5pm.

migros museum für gegenwartskunst
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The migros museum für gegenwartskunst is an institution of the Migros Culture Percentage.
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