

Cynthia Cruz, "In Paintings and Collage, the Beginnings of a New Language," *Hyperallergic*, April 23, 2015.

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In Paintings and Collage, the Beginnings of a New Language

by Cynthia Cruz on April 23, 2015 0

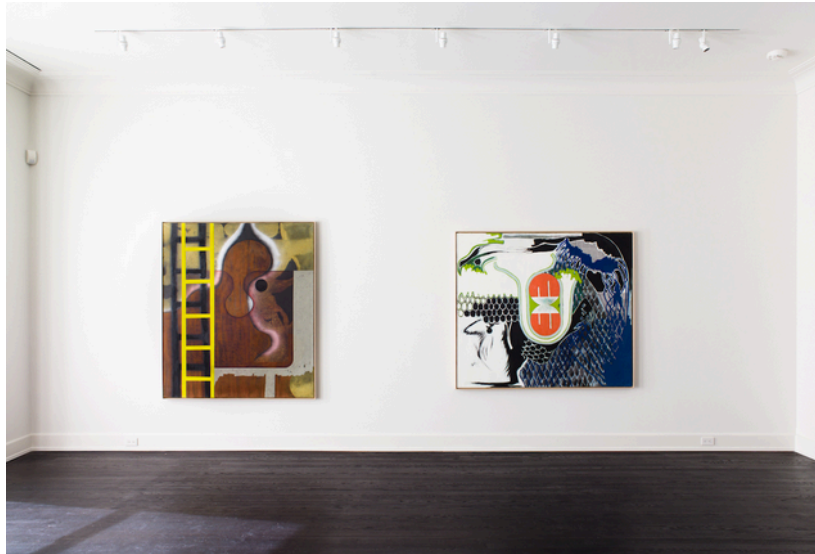


Charline von Heyl, "Untitled (2/95, II)" (1995), oil, acrylic, and pigment on canvas (all images courtesy Petzel Gallery)

The German artist Charline von Heyl's current show, *Dusseldorf*, currently on view at Petzel's new uptown gallery, presents a group of von Heyl's early collages and paintings from 1990–1995. These dynamic works, previously exhibited in Cologne and Munich, have never been shown in the United States.

Petzel

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Installation view of 'Charline von Heyl: Dusseldorf: Paintings from the early 90s' at Petzel Gallery

In the first room is a selection of eight collages constructed of ink, stamps, and Tippex on paper. Each of these pieces is titled "Untitled." In "Untitled" (1992) a series of little painted green tufts appear to have knitting needles stuck into them. The needle pierced into the soft tuft creates an action, a mutation of the two. This mutation is also what occurs when, in collage, two objects are set next to one another: a new, third, language is made. As a result, all of the objects are changed.

In the corner of the collage there appears to be a small box. It is within this box that the next mutation occurs: the small green tufts re-surface, this time minus the needles and now as more realistic representations of balls of yarn. In the third iteration, in the upper section of the collage, chaos ensues in what appears to be a gothic disturbance. Finally, in the fourth iteration, which occurs at the far left side of the piece, the symbols appear to be mathematical, like a childlike, quasi-scientific language. The piece (as well as all of her works) is a kind of language machine that brings to mind the works of John Bock and Dieter Roth.

In these collages we can see the beginnings of a new language — a preverbal one that is interested in iterating experience that cannot be explained with words. The places in experience that render us dumb, wordless. These inexplicable experiences remain within our secret selves if we cannot describe them — stuck in the crevice of inexplicability.

The German language is a language of additives: the *composita*, or compound words, are often gorgeous monstrosities (for example, the single word for a Saturday matinee ticket is *Sonnabendnachmittagssondervorstellungseintrittskarte*). The sentence structure of the German language is similarly a game of adding just one more word. And by doing so, the meaning of the entire sentence shifts. This playfulness and whimsy, as if playing a game of building blocks with a genius, I see also in the work of von Heyl: both in her collage work as well as in her paintings which are, of course, just one small remove from her collages.

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Like Sigmar Polke and Albert Oehlen, von Heyl's paintings are continuations of her smaller, more obvious collage work. But unlike Polke and Oehlen, von Heyl does not introduce outside language such as photography or advertisements. Instead, von Heyl continues her work of forming a new language by placing disparate objects next to one another: contrasting color and sharp forms next to soft forms, and so on.

At the Jewish museum last spring, von Heyl participated in a panel titled "Painting Beyond Belief," where she said she had been using the language of authors she admired as a starting point to her new work. For example, she said, she liked to open up *Finnegan's Wake* and look at three words or a phrase — so that you get at something, but not quite, like the feeling you get when looking at a painting.

At the panel, von Heyl said, "(I am) always coming back to this kernel of stupidity," the "stupidity" being the space between language, the something which cannot be named with language. Like starting a painting with three random words from *Finnegan's Wake*, von Heyl begins her work in a state of not knowing, a "dumbness," that allows for exploration. A kind of willed blindness; as James Joyce wrote, "A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery." In the end, von Heyl's work is a strange and beautiful laboratory, a means to move toward a new language, one alive and entirely new; one capable of speaking of the nothing that occurs inside the caesurae of incomprehension.

Charline von Heyl: Dusseldorf: Paintings from the early 90s continues at Petzel Gallery (35 E 67th St, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through May 2.



Charline von Heyl, "Untitled (8/90)" (1990), varnish, oil, charcoal on canvas, 150 x 180 cm

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