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Hugo Markl

ZÜRICH,
at Eva Presenhuber

by Quinn Latimer

“I’ve copied folk art that won’t become folk art,” Hugo Markl once remarked of his work. His version of “folk art” is derived from print and digital media imagery—porn magazines and websites, *Vogue* magazine, multinational company logos—which the California-born Austrian artist mines for photo-collages and sculptures that have glossy finishes and decidedly opaque meanings. Markl’s fascination with and scorn for Western consumer society’s most familiar visual symbols continues in his newest body of work, a curious series of 25 vibrant, medium-size marker-on-paper drawings (from 2008-09) tricked out in bright, candy-colored frames. Markl equally fetishizes the low or common image (crude drawings of naked women, the FedEx logo, street signs) and the high (John Cassavetes, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Color Field painting). Sometimes the artist conflates the two: a sketchy drawing of a naked woman’s abdomen and legs rendered in green marker dots, with the word “ROCK” scrawled between her knees, is dedicated to a famous Conceptual artist (*For Dan Graham*, 2009), which yields art-world, locker-room-humor results. *IQ Cover* (2009) is more explicit and evocative. Here the IKEA logo is transposed onto the distinctive orange cover of the ’80s-era Continuum paperback edition of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the drawing, “IKEA,” writ in the publisher’s über-serious, sans-serif font, replaces the original title, while the authors’ storied names remain beneath, as does Continuum’s own wavelike logo, the whole framed in pink, Easter egg-hued plastic.



It is hard not to read some of Markl’s own biography into *IQ Cover*: the artist studied visual communication in college during the ’80s in Vienna, where Horkheimer and Adorno’s seminal text on critical theory was likely inescapable. The drawing prompts a range of recognition, from the semi-arcane signifier (the out-of-print Continuum cover) to the over-obvious (the IKEA logo), and



this might be the artist's goal. Whether Markl is commenting on how global capitalism has replaced the Frankfurt School in significance or simply poking fun at its founders can't be ascertained.

The visual triggers in other works are more obscure. A number of drawings of horizontal or vertical stripes suggest Kenneth Noland, Gene Davis and other modernist painters engaged with the formal motif. In Markl's version, however, the lines are made in marker that bleeds into the paper, immediately conjuring one's childhood projects. In contrast, cartoonish drawings of military tanks with figures stuck on their turrets recall John Wesley, in whose work low-art motifs are wedded to mysteriously adult erotics. Despite the scope of these referents, however, the drawings feel remarkably static. Visual pleasure is limited by their artless execution, and the conflation of consumerist society and mass media is simply too familiar. In the end, Markl's effort feels less a critique than a crude emulation, itself masking some oddly serious adulation.

Photo: Hugo Markl: Left to right, IQ Cover, IQ Brown and IQ Henry, all 2009, marker on paper; at Eva Presenhuber.

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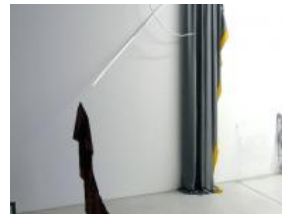


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