

d e s c h l e r . []

GALERIE

Patricia Waller

AT THE CIRCUS

28 May – 25 July, 2015

Auguststrasse 61
D-10117 Berlin, GERMANY

+49 (0) 30 Tel 283 32 88
+49 (0) 30 Fax 283 32 89

www.deschler-berlin.de
info@deschler-berlin.de

Patricia Waller strikes again: after the exhibitions “Bad Luck” and “Broken Heroes,” with their depictions of accidents, mishaps and the failure of super heroes, her black humor is now aimed at the world of the circus. “Menschen, Tiere, Sensationen” (literally “Humans, Animals, Sensations”) transforms the space of the gallery into a manège complete with acrobats, tight-rope walkers, sword-swallowers and clowns. The German title is taken from that of a German movie from 1938, belonging to a tradition of films inspired by the circus that includes Chaplin's “The Circus” (1929) and Federico Fellini's “La strada” (1954), the English title from the 1939 Marx Brothers' movie “At the Circus”.

NOTES
ON THE
EXHIBIT
ION

But Waller would not be Waller if her crocheted figures did not fail, in the most terrible fashion, in almost all of their magic tricks and acts. The woman sawn in half ends in butchery, the sword of the sword-swallower pierces his throat, the balancing acts lead to disaster. It remains open, however, whether all the blood and thunder is not just another clever illusion, a conjuring act meant to send a chill down the spines of the thrill-seeking audience.

“The circus has always been a favored theme of the visual arts,” Waller notes. “Picasso, Marc Chagall, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Georges Seurat, August Macke, Max Beckmann, Erich Heckel, Cindy Sherman, to name just a few who have worked with his subject matter. What is it that makes the World of the circus so interesting for visual artists? It might be the promise of freedom and adventure offered by this inspiring world of childlike play, so full of magic and mystery, far from tidy and boring structures. The clown is a universal figure. He amuses with his feigned clumsiness, demonstrating the ridiculous sides of our oftentimes tragi-comical daily fight for survival. The gloating laughter caused by his failures is directed at our own vanities. But at the same time clowns are heroes rebelling against the lack of imagination.” And even though the last decades have dismantled the myths surrounding the circus, the mass media have all too readily taken over its role: today's casting and reality shows are every bit as vulgarly entertaining and grotesque as the freak shows of bygone days.

Waller is fascinated by the parallels between the illusionary spaces of the circus and those of the visual arts. “In order to create an illusion, the circus employs various techniques and artifices: all of these are also used by the visual arts. The work of art, like the circus act, is based on staging a secret.” At the same time Waller observes a parallel between the sensationalist promotion of the circus and that of the art market. “Here, too, it is all about the ceaseless attempts to outdo the latest extravaganzas, to impress an increasingly jaded public, with never-before-seen spectacles and purportedly even more original ideas. The colorful, the special, the bizarre and the customary are joined in a glittering mixture: the world of the annual art fair is increasingly that of the circus. And just as the circus has to continuously reinvent itself, so the art market, too, has to strive for increasingly dazzling presentations of the allegedly new.”