

Erica Baum: A METHOD OF A CLOAK

March 6–April 18, 2020

Opening, March 6, 2020 / 6–9 pm

Fascinated by the printed word, concrete poetry, and the beauty of language permeating our daily lives, the American artist Erica Baum could be best described as a “poet-photographer”.

She has become internationally known for her photographic practice based on found texts and images. With her reflected, nonchalant use of strategies akin to the work of the Pictures Generation, conceptual art, and minimalism, Erica Baum has developed a unique and truly authentic visual language. For two decades now, her enigmatic close-ups of books, newspapers, and other printed matter have been investigating the nature, traditions, and essences of the photographic, steadily "re-materializing" its visual, haptic and thematic qualities.

Erica Baum's works are “photographic” in a very specific fashion: alongside the fleeting and ephemeral quality of the constant flow of images on display, she places an object-like presence and a precise interest in the material context of photography. By developing her series of pictures in direct close-ups, focused on surprising details with a shallow depth of field, she evokes a poetic power: indexically precise and at the same time abstract and trans-temporal like a collage, fragmentary and yet possessing a narrative power; seemingly everyday, trivial, and at the same time charged. Baum's pictures are emotional in a special sense – they have a soul and demand most careful attention. They question and confirm in very fundamental ways: text, image, writing – their message, significance and use – an understanding of the essence of our culture.

A METHOD OF A CLOAK is Erica Baum's first solo exhibition with KLEMM'S, presenting her current series *Patterns*, photographs taken from guidelines and booklets made for the home tailor. Drawing a line between the “dictate” of fashion and the language of sewing patterns, Baum lets the words resonate on their own, freed from the canvas of a sentence.

Visual information is here quite literally layered, the signs and lines, word fragments and figures on the various sides appear over and next to one another. On a yellow-patinated foundation and against a backdrop of faded blues, reds, and blacks, a rhythmic play of instructions, a multilingual fashion vocabulary, and freely hovering body silhouettes develops. Somewhere between technical drawing, geometric diagrams, and a minimalist sketch book.

Striking in *Patterns* is the division into larger formats and smaller, almost serialistic images. The latter, with their reduced drawing and textual components, set the tone for the abstract visual language and the concentrated rhythm of the work group. The outlines of the figures thus are all the more remarkable in the visual space of the larger, subtly composed tableaux. With their posture, gestures, and facial expressions, these de-humanized mannequins and strangely inanimate subjects seem confident and entirely autonomous. Framed by patterns and sewing instructions, a different form of legibility comes to the fore.

Erica Baum inscribes her current images with a weightlessness, which already on second glance suggests a deeper, critical interest. The alienation of maker and product in our world of commodities and the role of the invisible labor force in the sweatshops of global competition come to mind, alongside questions of gender stereotypes, control and still prevalent power relations.

By trusting the visual finesse and openness of her images, Baum succeeds in making various layers of this critical context palpable. Creating a stark contrast with the primary function of those manuals, which were actually aimed at “controlling” the body through arrangements, lines and cuts, they are now transcended into vessels for a much wider conversation.

Erica Baum (born in New York, 1961) received a BA in anthropology from Barnard in 1984 and an MFA from Yale University in 1994. Recent museum exhibitions include Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY ; Face à face, Frac île-de-france, Campus de Villeteuse; The Swindle: Art Between Seeing and Believing, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Lever le voile, Frac île-de-france, Paris; Photo-Poetics: An Anthology, Kunsthalle Berlin and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Reconstructions: Recent Photographs and Video from the Met Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include A Long Dress, Bureau, New York; Naked Eye Nature Morte, Galerie Crevecoeur, Paris; AAa:Quien, Erica Baum & Libby Rothfeld, Bureau, New York; The Following Information, Bureau, New York; Stanzas, Galerie Crevecoeur, Paris. Selected biennials include; AGORA 4th Athens Biennale, Athens, 2013 and the 30th Bienal de São Paulo: The Imminence of Poetics, São Paulo, Brazil, 2012. Her work is held in the public collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris; FRAC Ile de France, Paris; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.