

Ugly Things_Unlearning Beauty

What's classy if you're rich but trashy if you're poor?

This is one possible translation of the title into meme-fied language.

Ugly Things_Unlearning Beauty walks the fine line that distinguishes the affinity for cheap trash from expensive taste, while simultaneously undermining that very dichotomy. We closely examine the authority that decides who and what has a place in the museum and is thus deemed valuable enough to gain entrance, visibility and longevity. Ever meandering between the pitfalls of re-performing and re-producing institutional bottlenecks and drinking deep from the emancipatory potential of queer, emancipatory tactics, strategies and methods. After suffering the *institutional heartbreak*,¹ we do not seek to tear the institutions down, but rather to change them and contribute to the "defense of the institution of art as a site of critique and social engagement."²

Queer is a term that is still frequently used to devalue someone or something, to label them as deviant, perverse or disgusting - perhaps even ugly. In a similar way, some people use the expression "ugly thing" to objectify and dehumanize — when applied to a person. This exhibition draws parallels between the two labels and interrogates the motives and mechanisms behind such denominations — with the goal of exposing and dismantling them.

Through times of increasing fascisation of society, a gradual development that ultimately intends to eliminate all ways of living, being and loving that diverge from a construed norm, it becomes all the more urgent for the artistic autonomy to use its potential of subverting dominant notions of value and beauty as well as to withstand censorship. Especially when keeping in mind that a categorization of artists and artworks as "degenerate" once meant banning or killing them altogether and presently many hard-won rights and safeguards we have come to almost take for granted, are once again under attack.

We cast a major side-eye on the romanticization of poverty and the aestheticization of precarity — with examples of rich cosplayers who appropriate symbols of the working class. Keywords range from *normcore* to *queercore* to *uglycore*. When is something vintage, preloved, second-hand or garbage? The ambivalence of fashion and art, beating in time with the pulse of hyper-individuality, commodification and individual fulfilment provides food for thought. After classic signs of fatigue regarding the ironic gesture, we plunge into deconstruction and practise unlearning beauty.

A joyful reminder: punch up, don't kick down!

Curated by Thomas Trabitsch

¹ Vgl. Avalos, R., & Santander, M. (2023). Promises of diversity, inclusion, and equity: The heartbreak of cruel optimism. In A. Duran, T.J. Jourian, R. Miller & J. Cisneros (Eds.), *Queerness as being in higher education: Narrating the insider/outsider paradox as LGBTQ+ scholars and practitioners* (pp. 48-58). Routledge.

² Andrea FRASER, *Es geht um Kultur*. in: Beatrice VON BISMARCK, Therese KAUFMANN, Ulf WUGGENIG (Hg.), *Nach Bourdieu. Visualität, Kunst, Politik*, Wien 2008, S. 289–302.