

COSIMA VON BONIN
FEELINGS

MARCH 21 – JUNE 9, 2024

EXHIBITION TEXTS

The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting “feelings”, the first institutional solo exhibition by Cosima von Bonin in Germany in twelve years. The artist is showing textile paintings, sculptures, and installations from various series and periods, the majority of which are recent works never exhibited in Germany before.

Cosima von Bonin’s artistic practice fuses references to art history, pop culture, and music with an approach that involves experts from specialist craft fields. At the heart of her work lies the performativity of things: her objects and sculptures become events in the exhibition space. Soft toy assemblages, fabric collages on stretcher frames, rocket models with painted surfaces, crochet-covered cement mixers, and characters from comics and cartoons inhabit her exhibitions. Their initially cute appearance evokes a series of contradictions upon closer examination: cuteness and horror, softness and stiffness, humor and seriousness are combined in one and the same character. A key figure in her oeuvre is the comic creature Daffy Duck. As a representative of cheerful failure, he experiences catastrophic situations, yet survives every accident. The character accompanies the audience through the exhibition “feelings” as a leitmotif.

Cosima von Bonin collaborates with musicians and artist friends and integrates their work into her solo and group exhibitions. She puts her personal artistic genius to one side as she speaks openly about the collaborations that give rise to her creations. “I am many” or “We are many,” she says about herself and her collaborators. Appropriation, exaggeration, and an incisive play with words and images transform Cosima von Bonin’s art into a parcours of unfathomable humor. References to memories and experiences, such as those of childhood, become emotions—“feelings”.

DAFFY DUCK

The “Daffy formula” states that in order to be a Daffy, one must first and foremost be like Daffy. A person should not only possess attributes such as selfishness, cravenness, and a thirst for recognition, but all of these characteristics should be particularly exaggerated in the face of the challenging harshness of the universe.

The fact that Daffy’s characteristics are so out of proportion also ensures that he overcomes failure, keeps going, and gets up again—he returns from the dead. And so, when compared to the know-it-all and always carrot-nibbling rabbit Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck soon won the hearts of viewers of the Looney Tunes cartoon series. His distinctive features are a lisping, squelching pronunciation, a stocky figure with short, waddling legs, and a strong beak. Daffy’s personality undergoes various transformations. He leads a masked life that involves changes, being at once a crazy wise guy and a greedy scoundrel who is hungry for fame.

SMOKING

One encounters cigarettes being smoked in an elegant fashion on three occasions in the exhibition. They are reminiscent of advertising boards in front of kiosks. People smoke in their free time, when stressed, at the end of the evening, in bars, on street corners, and leaning against lanterns. In *The MK 2 Formula # 303 (outdoor version)* (2014), Cosima von Bonin quotes the artist Martin Kippenberger, a friend of hers. The work is a homage to his untitled streetlamp works from 1989 to 1991. Smoking is associated with nonconformity and rebelliousness. Smoking involves

wasting time and being an idler. It is also a rejection of, but not only, capitalist ideas of work and social rules. So, please smoke! Just not in the exhibition space.

MISSY MISDEMEANOUR #2 (THE BEIGE VOMITING CHICK, MISS RILEY [LOOP #2, 2006], MORITZ VON OSWALD'S VODOO BEAT & ROCKET BLAST BEAT), 2011

The title of this work contains two references to rockets: Miss Riley was an American teacher who supported Homer Hickam Jr. (engineer at NASA's US Army Missile Command and author). Miss Riley became famous through Hickam's memoir *Rocket Boys*. Were one to remove the letters R and y from "Miss Riley," one would end up with the word "Missile." Missy Misdemeanor will be familiar to those who grew up in the 1990s, as this was the name of the rapper Missy Elliott, a musician Cosima von Bonin likes mentioning together with Britney Spears and Rihanna. The word "misdemeanor" is also understood as an "offense" or "bad behavior toward others."

ROCKETS

When considering all the soft surfaces in Cosima von Bonin's oeuvre, one soon begins to wonder what the rockets actually feel like. Are they soft? Or is their exterior made of resistant material? In *Kings of The B* (2019), two of these rockets are whisked softly in a concrete mixer. Cosima von Bonin's works often reflect a moment oscillating between performance and exhaustion. Many of her pieces are a response to late capitalism and the need it evokes in one to function as a human being, to be creative, and to be able to use creativity in a profitable way. Even losers, after which the rockets are titled, are no longer permitted to be losers, but must instead concentrate on perpetual self-optimization. In Cosima von Bonin's work, one senses a counter-concept, time and again. The artist champions the exhaustion and tiredness that everyone experiences from time to time—in the form of collapsed soft toys and limp rockets.

DECEPTION

Many of Cosima von Bonin's works resonate with inner contradictions. For example, the word "cute" can be read here, but it appears in a font that does not correspond to the meaning at all. It is suggestive of the book titles of R. L. Stine's frightening paperback series *Goosebumps* from the 1990s. The outlines of Bambi in the artworks *Gaslighting* and *Love Bombing*, both from 2023, initially seem cute, but their titles refer to deceitful and dangerous psychological manipulation techniques in love relationships. Bambi manipulates, feigns love, fabricates facts, and suffocates us. Cute figures trigger certain emotions and behaviors, alluding to the often-manipulative consumer and entertainment world. Even if her installations appear colorful and amusing at first glance, Cosima von Bonin's works move between opposites such as humor and seriousness, love and hate, fantasy and reality, superficiality and enigma.

TEXTILE IMAGES

Cosima von Bonin's banner-like works are evocative of Blinky Palermo's sewn monochromes from the late 1960s or Sigmar Polke's early paintings on cheap fabrics. She also calls her patchwork wall pieces, which are made by professional tailors, "Lappen" (rags) and they combine both exclusive and cheap fabrics. These works frequently feature humorous text fragments, borrowed from other artists, alongside cartoonish figures. As an example, the statement "Harmony is a strategy" in the work *Shirt / Fluff / Same Day* (2007) stems from lyrics by Dirk von Lowtzow, the singer in the German band Tocotronic. A number of her works reference contemporary lifestyle elements. Here, she incorporates the signature styles of designers, such as Martin Margiela's distinctive X-stitch.

SOFT SCULPTURES

The two dog figures in the works *Petit Saint Bernard avec box* and *Petit Saint Bernard avec box (linen eyepatch version)* (2016) are made of textile materials. The Saint Bernards sit on their boxes like two bouncers, ready to be observed. Cosima von Bonin's works are teeming with soft sculptures. Formal equivalents to these "soft sculptures" can also be found in the work of other artists, such as Dorothea Tanning, Claes Oldenburg, and Mike Kelley. A common factor in their work is that what is small becomes large, and what is hard becomes soft. As with her "Lappen" (rags), the three-dimensional wall pieces with her patchwork technique, Cosima von Bonin also has her sewn sculptures made by professional tailors.