

## EVA BERENDES HALF / TIME

Writing during the game. Through the open window, waves of noise from neighboring televisions roll with a slight delay into the room. Like an echo they add themselves to the murmur of my own television and fill the room with a somewhat transparent, fascinating sound. Where does it come from? It seems impossible to determine the direction. Psychoacoustics could describe this phenomenon in terms of the Haas effect and summing localization, but the scientific explanation would not affect its rather unreal charm, even if the sounds are only those of a soccer game.

The science of optics seems to have no convenient term to describe a similar phenomenon in the visual field, apart from the word stereoscopic. Could the effect of Eva Berendes's screens possibly be explained by saying that the viewer perceives them stereoscopically, as it were, taking them in as home accessories with one eye and as works of art with the other? An absurd notion, given that Eva Berendes's art does not, like op art, aim to confuse the senses, demanding instead a culturally determined gaze – and that, of course, only partly follows the laws of visual perception.

What places demands on us can also enrich us. The simply designed, geometrically refined wooden frames – which were also a defining feature of Eva Berendes's earlier sculptures that do not display any characteristics of objects of daily use – create an austere, almost sublime elegance. Only the title hints at a contradiction: New Schubert Pink is the industrial denotation of a dark magenta bordering on violet that is mainly used today for colored filters in photography (translucence 28%). Its name reveals its past as a decorative coloring during the heyday of Broadway – sophisticated, good on stage, distinguished, chic. It was with toys like this (discovered in forgotten warehouses or props departments) that Italian avant-garde designers once dispatched the stylistics of modernism into the witty, allusive stance of postmodernism, taking over art deco and aspects of the Bauhaus on the way. Eva Berendes now turns this operation around; even the most colorful of her screens have a degree of distanced severity. In their gesture of reticence they have an air of in-between steadiness that distinguishes them from the ironic designs of Alessandro Mendini and Ettore Sottsass, whose creations during the 1970s and early 1980s were, in the end, just well-disguised everyday objects.

Eva Berendes's new screens are presented on pedestals. In the exhibition space they appear to be sculptures, yet their possible functionality cannot be deduced. They also occupy uncertain territory in another way: instead of covering them with an opaque fabric, Eva Berendes has strung them with parallel threads, giving them a transparency that is in opposition to the intended use of a screen as a room divider. Viewed up close they are reminiscent of the strings of a harp, while from a distance they resemble crayon hatching on white paper, which underlines their impalpability even more. In front of a white wall, the coloring of the threads takes on a certain pastel delicacy that keeps the aggressive power of New Schubert Pink in check.

It is a psychological game with proximity and distance, driven by the curiosity of the viewer on the one hand and the pedestals that encourage a rather distanced form of contemplation on the other. Thus, one of the photographers documenting the screens, captivated by the charm of this partially disguised, colored transparency, was inspired to take shots of other works through the threads. Playful contact or distance – both approaches to Berendes's works are tempting, but neither is adequate. Her screens seem to flicker in the space between the decorative ornamentation of applied art and the abstraction of modernism. Berendes's objects tell of the play with the categories – fine art versus design – that has fundamentally characterized the perception of art for the last hundred years. Central aesthetic and substantive tensions have arisen through a constant crossing of such boundaries. It appears frivolous to have them collide once again in a folding screen.

But for Berendes, not taking the game seriously would mean working, as do so many contemporary artists, for the salon. The association seems natural – where better for a folding screen than an aesthetic soirée? But no matter how they are presented, with or without a pedestal, the mere presence of a screen rekindles the argument over definitions. What is it? Art? Design? A discrete but impossible object? Berendes's works bide their time in the space they themselves have staked out between time, intention and attribution. A game? Yes, but a dangerous one, and not one to be played by the light muse.

Oliver Tepel, Checkpoint #6, 2008