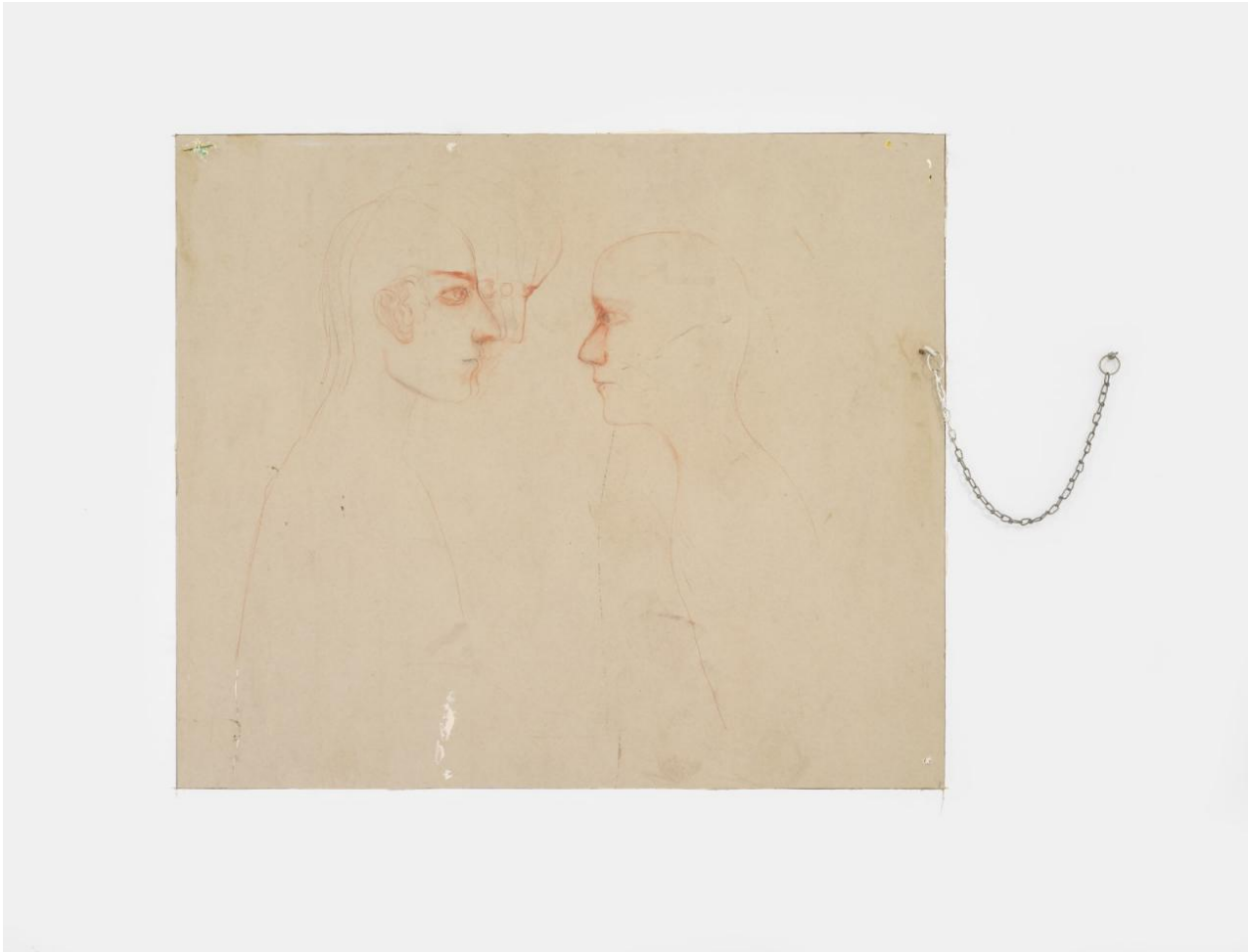


“The Displacement Effect” at Captain Petzel, Berlin

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by Eliza Levinson



A group show at Captain Petzel is full of subtle interventions that throw our perspective off-kilter, marrying modernist design – rigorous, linear, and in control; not unlike the white cube itself – with playful nods to incongruity.

“Displacement” is a word typically used to articulate aftermath: that which immediately follows movement; the moments as the dust settles. Any art installation is the product of numerous (intentional) displacements: objects and their histories are imported into the gallery space, as wall texts do their best to fill in the blanks. Displacement can imply a sense of uprooting, as in discussions about repatriation, which highlight tensions about identity and ownership. But displacement can also be hopeful – followed by replacement; implicitly, resolution. Drawing together disparate works, a tension oozes from their differences, provoking new dialogue, as in [“The Displacement Effect”](#), curated by critic Kirsty Bell in collaboration with Hans-Peter Jochum (of Jochum Rodgers gallery for historical design).



On entry, the gallery evokes an upscale showroom. Dark-hued and sleek mid-20th century furniture designed by a number of women artists (Gae Aulenti, Renata Bonfanti, Liliana Grassi, Sofie Dawo, Reni Shulman-Trüdinger and Nanda Vigo) dots the ground floor. These pieces straddle an ambivalence shared with high-end design objects: are these artworks, or mere household commodities? The uncertainty holds additional conceptual nuance given that all were made by female artists between the 1950s and 70s. The complicated, sexist history of womens' work being relegated to the realm of craft haunts the viewer's introduction to the exhibition: would these pieces be more "at home" elsewhere (a storefront; a domicile)? The designers all belong to a modernist, post-Bauhaus generation; all are from the West, another nod to the show's titular theme of displacement, given the gallery's location in the (former) East. This portion of the show is also a nod to the architectural history of Captain Petzel's location, which used to be a showroom known as *Kunst im Heim* ("Art in the Home"). In this way, the "displacement" of these vintage design works is more temporal than physical: spectres of the building's past returned to display in the present.



In conversation with these themes of temporality, iconography, art history, and belonging, the *Tenant (Dream Catcher)* series by Tolia Astakhishvili and James Richards is where the exhibition's concept clicks into place. *Tenant* (2021) reveals itself gradually, first through a small intervention in Shulman-Trüdinger's *Typ II* (1956). *Typ II* is

geometric and precise: a minimalist structure of plywood, lacquered metal, and aluminium sliding doors standing more than two metres high. On the bottom three shelves, the aluminium sliding doors – flat and grey, with a single hole like a cleaver – cover just a portion of the plywood ledge. The centre shelf has no sliding door at all, allowing viewers to see straight through the gallery window behind it, into the courtyard or onto Karl-Marx-Allee.

It is on this shelf – emptiness, bracketed – that a sheaf of cream-coloured paper has been placed, as if absentmindedly, at an angle. On the page is a simple, almost childlike, black ink drawing of a face in profile. The contrast between Shulman-Trüdinger's imposing minimalist sculpture and Astakhishvili and Richards' deskilled drawing is jarring. *Was this a mistake?* the viewer wonders. By disrupting the sanctity of Shulman-Trüdinger's immaculate shelves, Astakhishvili and Richards offer a rejoinder to the art space's fantasy of calculated perfection; its almost-clinical cleanliness and control.



Moving through the gallery, other, more intrusive, interventions are revealed. Behind the wall displaying Vera Palme's *SOS (high)* (2020) sits a messy array of leaves, dirt, ash, sand, found objects including deconstructed pipes, a showerhead, an unplugged fan, and archival photographs. These objects clash loudly with the polished faux-showroom of the ground floor, inspiring the same simultaneous exposure and discomfort as in *Typ II*, interrupting the orderly space.

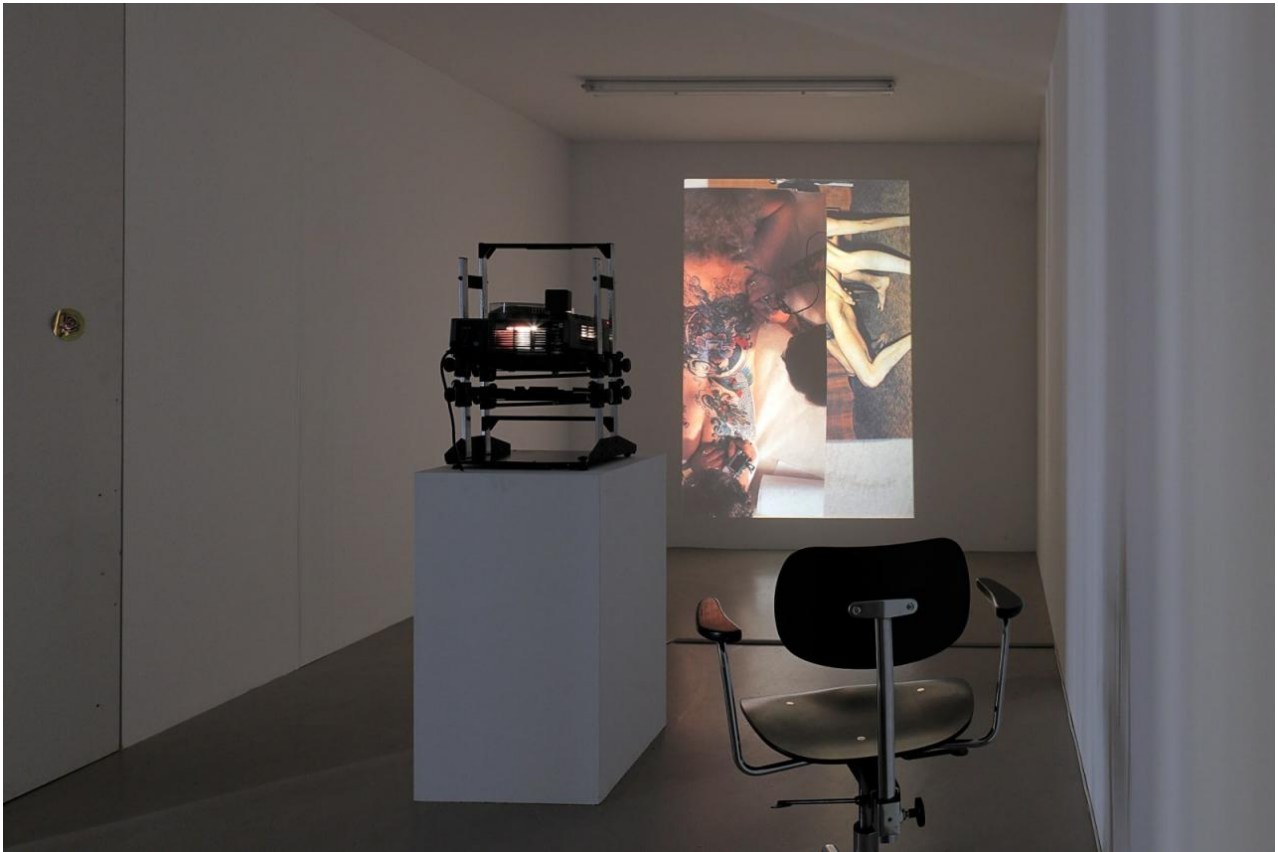
Upstairs, the artists present their finale. Sandwiched between Andrea Büttner's large-scale woodcut prints, *Spargelfeld* and Xinyi Cheng's painting, *Long-distance Swimmer* (both 2021), Astakhishvili and Richards line a row of several, mostly dark, plastic crates, a

wooden box, and a bucket. These contain found objects including drawings, wadded up newspaper, cutlery, old postcards and plastic bags, a knotted brown wig, and a papier-mâché head, staring blankly into the middle distance. Here, the artists go so far as to stage a puddle of water leaking from a dirty bin and a faint trail of dirt running down the gallery wall. At the tail end of the installation is the titular dreamcatcher, dangling peacefully from a cable railing.



Through its precisely orchestrated exposure of disorder, *Tenant (Dream Catcher)* provokes questions about what the viewer anticipates from an upscale, commercial art space – a friction exacerbated by its juxtaposition against the traditional art objects elsewhere in the exhibition. Because the artworks within “The Displacement Effect” are ultimately so varied and discordant, the initial impact is intense; hard to make sense of. But the disruptive interventions by Astakhishvili and Richards paradoxically pierce through to clarity.

“The Displacement Effect” dresses the gallery as neither a commercial space nor a seamless, unobtrusive white cube. With *Tenant’s* calculated disruption, the curators roll forward one more set piece: the storage space. Undergoing multiple transformations in a single show, the exhibition room itself is displaced: drifting above, gesturing towards the ethereal yet bound to its past and present like a tethered balloon.



“The Displacement Effect”

Captain Petzel

26 June – 22 August 2021

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