

Milena Dragicevic: *OF ANTS* – Galerie Martin Janda

By William Gass

The fur-covered motorcycle near Vienna's Kaisermühlendam shouted woolly horsepower and made me think of Jackalopes. The Jackalope, the jackrabbit with antelope antlers, is the drunken taxidermist's answer to the Classical chimera, and when compared to the contemporary genetic juxtapositions provided by the Sci-Fi Channel, absolutely boring. It is this sort of subtly pedestrian pairing of animal parts in the Jackalope that I encountered at Milena Dragicevic's recent show of paintings at Martin Janda. There are geometric grotesques, still-lives of impossible objects, unlikely portrait sitters, and visionary landscapes. She uses simple and familiar forms as the basis for implying uninhibited growth and as a means of modifying and ultimately distorting recognizable figurative identity (figures becoming objects, figures becoming paint on canvas) through unlikely connections. The colors are super garish...some stew of yesterday's Lincoln Logs invading Atari's monochromatic background space, while ideas of simultaneous progress and decay impossibly hover in limbo; comfortable, new-old relics, where painting interacts with itself and its own visual codes.

I can't find myself escaping the sense of abandonment in the non-portrait paintings. Being that these monstrosities survive in a nebulous realm of permanence and silence, I can't tell if they're supposed to exist before the pre-fab Big Bang or after the modular Apocalypse. Where the ones in the *aalliraujaq* series are something that "was" or "will be," the ones in the *Turksiavic* series are places with trapped potential. This series embraces abstracted Minimalist forms with architectural tendencies that take on the qualities of landscape, albeit a decorative landscape. Decoration (or is it design?) is the term with which I keep struggling, obsessing, and drooling over in regards to this show. I love that the *Turksiavic* series uses Minimalism as a gesture to occupying its glaring green silence. They're decorative in that the forms have no reality, yet achieve the basic function of stackable structures. The background color choices are so intense, that anything existing in the color field is doomed to the banal void, where the painting's light betrays no secret of its birth. Even the brown the forms absorb evokes a designed sense of the "once natural," in these contexts i.e. my Ikea furniture started molting into my color bars. The decoration of the *aalliraujaq* series is more restrained

to the forced interaction of objects. In *aalliraujaq* 6 we basically have a still life object of some questionable origin, yet with three superimposed circles on top of them. There is a sense of confusion with these simple shapes' trying to relate a purpose to the more significant and "tabled" object. This is decoration as alien and artificial, not a sense of "utopian invitation of overwhelming awesomeness" like a John Armleder installation. It's not that the circles' duty of decoration is trapped unsuccessfully in the painting, it's more that their ornate effect is akin to Tom Hanks wearing a white tuxedo: politely awkward.

At the risk of sounding daft, decoration as it is contained in the group of *supplicant* portraits is largely superficial, when compared with the previous two series. Dragicevic uses geometric shapes to create new mutants from former figures rescued from in-flight water landing diagrams. I find them remarkable for the total deadpan delivery of their new faces; they frighten me in that they inhabit a zone better reserved for David Lynch. The emotionless flavor of their falsified expressions imbues them with a "purer" sense of vitality than normal portraits. Where the historical portrait has a stare-way arrested to the archives for posterity, Dragicevic's mugs are toying with the fabric of space and time, unaware that they are interacting with the 1s and 0s of their genetic code. No depths into which one may recede; only gestures resembling cold graffiti on the artist's part, creating dolls that are wrapping paper, masking their contents.