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From: Frieze
Reto Pulfer
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Frieze



Schr. Sommer, 2011, cotton, bedsheet, ink, on wooden stretcher

For his second solo show at BaliceHertling, 'Schr. Sommer' (or, as it was translated in the press release, 'The Lives of an Armoire'), Berlin-based artist Reto Pulfer created an installation that owed as much to peaches, grapes and pears as it did to cabinets of curiosity. A central installation entitled *ZR Vielfältiger Schrank* (ZR

Multifaceted *Armoire*, 2011-12) consisted of a disassembled wooden wardrobe inside which a can of fruit cocktail, a rooster's tail feathers, spice jars, a piece of polyester and shards of Raku-fired ceramics were placed. Draped around the armoire were zippered-together cotton bedsheets with diagrams scrawled in pen across their surfaces. Combined with its diverse contents, the work's somewhat casual display made it resemble a kind of home altar more than an 18th-century *Wunderkammer*. Instead of representing a collection, or attempting to organize and classify its contents, Pulfer's armoire had an arbitrariness to it that seemed to discourage fixity and categorical boundaries. Through a proliferation of meanings, references and puns (i.e. cocktail/cock tail/cock tale), even the more heavily laden elements within the work - ones that otherwise might have referenced myth, symbolized death or signified the exotic - were caught in intensified associational drifts.

Indeed, if the artist emphasised his armoire's *lives* rather than its life, it was partly to underscore the many unstable transformations that objects undergo as they move between values and contexts - for example, the changes in the armoire's 'social lives' as it made the transition from factory to showroom, a domestic setting, a Berlin studio and a Paris gallery. Yet, despite this instability, the objects on display in BaliceHertling did retain some of their integrity, even as they participated in larger flows and formed broader chains of association. Perhaps it was this notion, referred to in the press release as a kind of 'fruit cocktail', that shaped the exhibition's underlying narrative - or as Pulfer has called it, the show's 'mnemonic'.

Surrounding the *Schrank* was a separate series of patchwork objects made from various fabrics collected from the artist's family and friends, stitched together and stretched over asymmetrical wooden frames. Hung at varying heights, the works - which are mainly restricted to a palette of blues, purples, yellows and whites - each contain the abbreviation 'Schr' in their titles, linking them to the installation and encoding them more deeply within the artist's idiosyncratic vocabulary. Formally, the objects themselves are quite ludic: ripped and frayed at the edges, irregularly stitched, stained and splattered with ink; pockets are sewn shut or turned inside out, while bundles of loose threads dangle over thick braids. In *Schr. Sommer* (2011), the two shoulder straps of a white tank top nonchalantly hang off the bottom edge of the frame.

Displayed in the gallery's foyer behind a marble desk and bookshelf was *Die Wege Der Kammern* (The Way of the Cabinet, 2011), the most painterly work on view, a large swathe of cotton featuring a field of overlapping pencil marks and ink splatters in mostly ochre and turquoise. If this work in fact mapped 'the way of the cabinet', the routes linking it to the cocktail-mnemonic remained obscure. But by displacing the typical contents of a wardrobe and making them material for his sculptures, Pulfer suggested another more metaphorical level: a private 'interior life' which has been evacuated, reassembled and put on display.