

Flash Art

Lucy Dodd Sprüth Magers / Berlin

by Aaron Bogart
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Lucy Dodd, “Lake in the Sky,” installation view at Sprüth Magers, Berlin (2017).
Courtesy the Artist and Sprüth Magers, Berlin. Photography by Timo Ohler.

One is never quite sure what to expect from a Lucy Dodd exhibition. She’s cooked catfish and served cocktails in carved-out cucumbers; she’s had musicians perform unidentifiable chants while handing out a milky drink to those willing to take it. But whatever happens, one is guaranteed a sensorial journey through painterly abstraction.

Her first solo show in Germany is no different; one’s senses are immediately struck at the entrance by an imposing floor-to-ceiling painting. *Butterfly* (2017) looks like a giant Rorschach blot, whose reddish center symmetrically splits two white circles above large brown members. The pink and beige “wings” extending outward from these visually dominant elements comprise organic materials -- squid ink and yerba mate -- used frequently by the artist. The painting is an architectural intervention in its size and placement, and like a monumental square screen it needs to be navigated in order to reach a second work of the same scale behind it. This kind of anticipation and unknowability is typical of Dodd’s shows. The second work, *Egg* (2017), shares the same symmetrical composition, albeit with the addition of more obviously figurative elements. Two angelic bodies poised wistfully on either side of an empty white mandorla recall the “birth of elements” motif from the murals of Lukhang, used to illustrate the origin of the universe. Dodd’s paintings lend themselves to such mystical connotations; strengthened by incense and strange brews, the spiritual is hard to miss in this work.

The paintings-cum-dividers manifest a third room containing two smaller paintings, three works on paper, a mirror and some furniture. Dodd held a performance here on the night of the opening, in a space in which the smaller scale of the paintings reinforces the fascinatingly strange, frenetic quality of her work. Yet the inclusion of religious symbology in this show seems heavy-handed, taking the mystery out of Dodd’s fluid and elemental approach to abstraction – but then again, I wonder what she’ll do next.