

ARTFORUM

Monika Baer

GALERIE BARBARA WEISS

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Monika Baer's approach to painting is as systematic as it is painterly. In her current exhibition, "Return of the Rear," she presents three new bodies of work, all precise investigations into the toolbox of her medium. Six large paintings, dominate the space. In three of these—*rote Wand (3)* (red Wall [3]); *rote Wand (4)* (red Wall [4]) (both 2012); and *Extended Failure*, 2011-12—a cadmium-red layer of pigment is painted on the left side, while on the right Baer has depicted the surface of a brick wall. Meticulously rendered steel chains drop into the middle of the scene from the upper right; they are mediated by gestural lines and blotches of white paint. The other three large canvases, a set of fleshy untitled pink works from 2012 are slightly slimmer than the others, and are hung in alternation with the "red walls."



View of "Return of the Rear," 2012.

In this confrontation between a tone associated with the body's interiority and the cadmium red, a surrealistic impression emerges, and the viewer becomes another one of these life-size body layers. A series of five smaller monochromatic black paintings appear as the aesthetic counterpoint to this arrangement, even as they share a formal element with their pinkish opposite: Each of these eight features a stencil-like keyhole, painted in white, light blue, and pink on each black painting and in black on the bottom of each fleshy canvas.

One work, however, stands apart from all these serial variations: a small gray canvas, *Sunrise (ohne Oehlen)* (Sunrise [Without Oehlen]), 2012. Its surface is interspersed with small round mirrors. "Sunrise" charmingly sums up a possible undertone of Baer's endeavor: Where the works of Oehlen, Kippenberger, and others often appear as "bad painting," disintegrating the medium by its own means, Baer's laborious studies could be called "good painting," reintegrating painting's scattered tools into strong painterly arguments.

— Kerstin Stakemeier

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