

Amelie von Wulffen
PRESS



Review: Amelie von Wulffen, Freedman Fitzpatrick, 2015
By Keith J. Varadi

Art in America
June 19, 2015

Art in America

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LOS ANGELES,
at Freedman Fitzpatrick

by Keith J. Varadi

Amelie von Wulffen:
Untitled (birth of an alcoholic), 2015, oil on canvas, 39¼ by 31½ inches; at Freedman Fitzpatrick.



It's fitting that German artist Amelie von Wulffen has painted her visual narratives directly onto school chairs in the past. This gesture could be seen as an appropriate metaphor for her entire oeuvre, illuminating her exuberance as a student of painting. Always eager to learn more about the history of the medium and what she might be able to contribute to it, she consistently and confidently inserts herself into the ongoing conversation about its relevance.

The first of 12 paintings on view in her recent exhibition at Freedman Fitzpatrick, *Untitled (running putti)*—all works 2014 or 2015—depicts a group of cherubs playing grab-ass, a raucous send-up of the typically precious portrayals of angel babies. The following painting, *Untitled (the lowest point of my childhood)*, takes an immediate turn from heavenly fantasies to an image of hell on earth: a solemn blonde-haired girl is shown standing front and center in a scorched-earth landscape, her head encased in a bubblegum-pink halo or helmet or force field. Is this an anti-nostalgic von Wulffen self-portrait? Does it even matter? Like a clothed, tween version of Manet's *Olympia*, the subject meets her viewer's gaze and gives the impression that she knows something the individual looking back at her does not.

Next in this fantastical romp was a haunting painting of a forlorn teenage girl. Resembling a Balthus figure in timeout, she faces away from the male behind her and, like the subject in the previous work, stares out at the viewer. Then came a painting of a thumb-sucking

goblet; and another showing a “werewolf girl going for drinks” (according to the work’s title) in a bucolic village with a sublime sunset, foreshadowing some probable hell-raising. Near the gallery’s tinted storefront window, tiny sculptures of insect-angel hybrids were positioned on the ground, each made of modeling clay and painted with acrylic. The little creatures, whether slouching, slumping, sleeping or surveying the foreign expanse of the parking lot and beyond, appeared to be caught in isolated moments of self-realization or self-reflection.

With each work here, the viewer was prompted to make specific historical and contextual associations—to think about what it meant to encounter *this* story or figure at *this* moment and in *this* place—which led to considerations of the actions and motivations of individuals in general. This existential exercise was not far from the experience of reading an Italo Calvino book or watching a Paul Thomas Anderson film.

Like Calvino and Anderson, von Wulffen is a master of vignettes. She can go light and comic or dark and dramatic. Often, she sways back and forth between the two poles with unexpected rhythm, like a malfunctioning metronome. All brushstrokes and knife smears feel equally fluid and disruptive, functional and disjointed. Visitors to the Freedman Fitzpatrick show encountered her skewed realities within a multilayered context—a gallery in a Hollywood strip mall—allowing them to identify even more acutely with the sad souls trapped within her historical-painting pastiche.