

Tobias Madison
PRESS



Review: Do It to Do It, Kunstverein Munich, 2010
By Dominikus Müller

Artforum
January 2011

Tobias Madison



View of "Tobias Madison," 2010.

The title of Tobias Madison's recent show was the tautological mantra "Do It to Do It," a phrase borrowed from Donald Trump's 1987 book, *The Art of the Deal*. This information—presented in the small accompanying catalogue—laid a trail from the outset: The exhibition was likely to be about the entrepreneurial side of making art and being an artist. Entering the show itself, one was immediately struck by the large number of collaborations, for example, *Bora Bora Structure for Munich*, 2010, created in collaboration with Kaspar Müller: hammocklike seats and other objects, all made of bamboo, carabiners, climbing ropes, and beads—art made of projections of the exotic and foreign along with the emblems of a booming outdoor industry that, in this age of ubiquitous network capitalism, promotes belief in the illusion of "self-discovery" in the isolation of natural surroundings. Another collaboration, this time with artist and collector Ruedi Bechtler, resulted in a group of works that appropriate and modify objects and vases by Ettore Sottsass, a founder of the Memphis Group. The space thus created, with a repurposed table and photographs on the wall, was a "new domestic landscape" in the signature Memphis style, but abstracted and made even more surface-oriented: collectible design upgraded to Art. Madison's combination of collaboration, appropriation, image production, and revaluation appeared at its pithiest in one work from a series of expressive paintings whose canvases consist of bright blue banners from the Radisson Blu hotel chain, a collaboration with Matias Faldbakken and Alain Jenny. The company's slogan "Yes I Can!" is still legible through the wild streaks of paint. Madison steals these flags from the rooftops and entryways of Radisson Blu hotels, then gives them to artist friends to paint on.

The main exhibition space gained its energy from a similar focus on surface and furnishings: empty aluminum shelving, tarps covered with abstract "digital paintings," and a series of columnlike vitrines with bases clad in exotic wood veneers, filled with bouquets of plastic flowers. Techniques of appropriation that result in surplus value generation could be found everywhere in the show, and the collaboration principle was used to subvert the notion of authorship—but only to the extent that a positive sum still appeared on the author's own account: Half the works in the largest gallery were Madison's solo projects. What differentiates him from other artists who point to the economic structures of the art system is his nonchalant response to the mechanisms he reveals. In pointing to them, he makes use of them for his own ends, shaking off any belief that these techniques, solidified into quotable strategies, might still have some remnants of critical consciousness clinging to them.

No wonder Madison's career has been thriving. He succeeds in creating a sense of logical congruence between the economic and social conditions of production in his work and its subject matter. No resources are squandered. Every step brings added value to his brand. What made this show so convincing was the brutal consistency with which it staged this cycle of value creation as a central topic of Madison's work, presenting it as something that is structurally bound to occur in an age when subjectivity and connectivity have been promoted to the principal currencies of capitalism. Other artists might run into a brick wall over and over again while trying to escape the performative pitfalls of critical-reflexive strategies, but Madison just opens the door and walks right through.

—Dominikus Müller

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.