

Amelie von Wulffen
PRESS



Review: Am kühlen Tisch, Galerie Mayer Kainer, 2015
By Jens Asthoff

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GALERIE MEYER KAINER



Amelie von Wulffen, *Untitled*, 2013, oil on canvas, 78 3/4 × 55 1/8".

Goya's a great guy—you'd be happy to go on vacation with him, see exhibitions together, or just shoot the breeze, and you can always call him when you're feeling down. Or so it would seem, based on Amelie von Wulffen's latest paintings. Max Beckmann, on the other hand, comes off as a little less approachable: Although the weather's perfect for sailing, he just stands there in his blue jacket, smoking and staring blankly at nothing in particular. Then there's van Gogh, another member of von Wulffen's posse, gazing from the wooden backrest of an old-fashioned classroom chair with an expression of slightly befuddled skepticism—you've seen it before, in his *Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat*, 1886–87. Von Wulffen's exhibition "*Am kühlen Tisch*" (At the Cool Table) was chock-full of visual quotations from the dawn of modernism and bristled with the period's newfound sense of freedom: As these men saw it, creative emancipation from pictorial formulas went hand in hand with liberation from society's constraints. It was a star-studded show: Gauguin, too, put in a personal appearance; Cézanne and Gustave Caillebotte were invoked through their styles. The exhibition consisted of eight large paintings, a pencil-drawn animated video, and five chairs arranged behind the projector—their seats and backrests had been painted, suggesting that they weren't really meant for sitting.

The central and highly entertaining narrative in which von Wulffen encounters her painterly forebears is unspooled in the 2013 video that gave the exhibition its title: In pale and appropriately awkward drawings with speech balloons and the occasional eraser trace, von Wulffen concocts a caustically funny satire on her own day-to-day life as an artist, replete with embarrassing slipups, weird obsessions, and the machinations of a perfidious art scene. At an opening dinner, all the important people sit at "the cool table" while the artist's alter ego is stuck making boring conversation with other misfits. One day she logs on to artfact.com to check in on her standing and gets wildly worked up because her market value has plummeted. Another low point comes when her sister, whose life seems to revolve around housework and diets, becomes a hit at Documenta. Von Wulffen is often accompanied by her buddy Goya; as they ride the train together, she muses about his fashionable attire, the hat and short jacket he is seen wearing in his famous *Self-Portrait in the Studio*, 1790–95. She doesn't think too highly of it: "He powders his hair and wears these fashionable clothes—it doesn't suit him at all, makes him look quite pastoral." A moment later, gazing out the window, she waxes enthusiastic: "Goya—look how beautiful—3 different kinds of clouds in blue, brown and pink; shame that these things can't be painted anymore." Goya asks uncomprehendingly,

"Why? What do you mean?" Von Wulffen, at a loss to explain, replies, "Oh, you really wouldn't get it."

Surrounding this satirical tale of art, the market, and life were colorful paintings (all untitled), re-creations of works from classic modernism and protomodernism. In reality, Goya's self-portrait measures a mere 16 5/8 x 11", but von Wulffen has blown it up to 79 x 55". Moreover, she's painted it with deliberate amateurishness and, to highlight the irony, filled in some areas with abstract brushwork and added two surreally oversize bees. In paraphrasing Beckmann's final *Self-Portrait in Blue Jacket*, 1950, she transplanted the German Expressionist from his studio to a Post-Impressionist lake scene with sailboats. All in all, the show served as a dramatic-comedic narrative as well as a stylistic tour de force of art history, the contemporary art world, and the aesthetic life—with Goya as von Wulffen's Virgil.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.