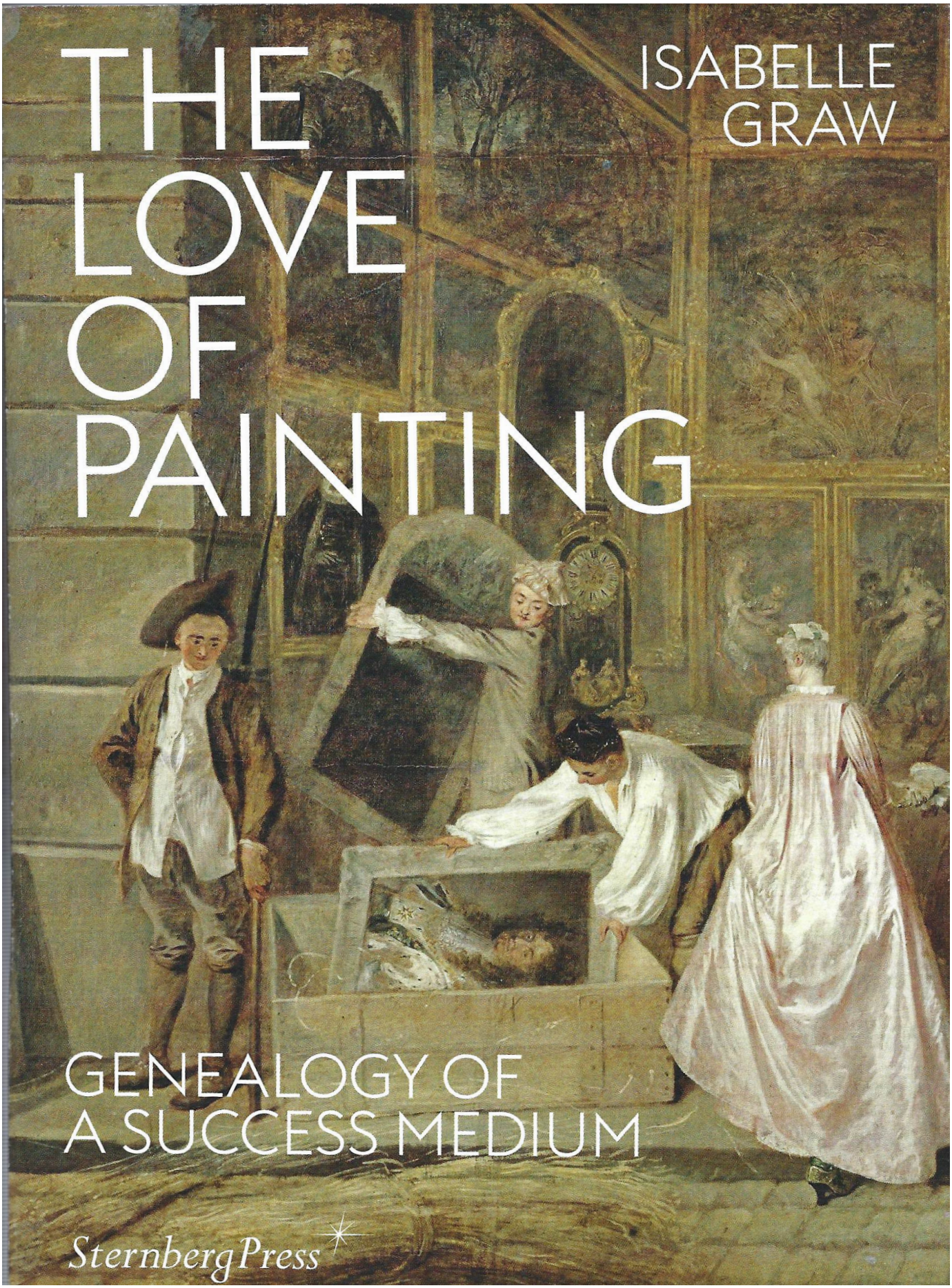


The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium, Isabelle Graw, Cover, 2018

Human Figures with a Painterly Appeal

On Anthropomorphism, Mannequins, and Painting in the Work of Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison

Today's art world is rife with yearning for the human figure, or more specifically, for works onto which the viewer can project a figure. In the following pages I will focus on the works of Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison to show in detail how, as in the 1960s, it is now often the rhetoric of Minimalism that serves to suggest the presence of a human being (who, needless to say, is in reality absent) in manifold ways. These two artists' early assemblages, in particular, speak a Minimalist formal idiom. In their later works, the human proxies are increasingly accessorized with props such as gym equipment, vitamin pills, clothes, or umbrellas, which further emphasize their anthropomorphic quality. When Harrison "seats" her biomorphically shaped objects on a table in a conference room (as in her show at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin, in 2016), or when Genzken throws jackets over her trolley cases (as she did for her installation *Oil* at the 52nd Venice Biennale, in 2007), this triggers the viewer's fantasy that these assemblages could be perceived as "quasi subjects" who shoulder the burdens of life in a neoliberal economy for us, as our proxies such as the imperative to optimize ourselves through exercise or the call to be always on the move.

What I mean by quasi subjects is that these objects behave (or seem to behave) as subjects, as though they are possessed of agency and changeable inner states and capable of acting upon their environment. Some of them may also be read as allegories of a *damaged* subjectivity: there are maltreated dolls, tattered mannequins, and shapeless entities that appear to have lost control of themselves. But what's remarkable is that it's invariably *painterly gestures* that further heighten this suggestion of aliveness. Harrison's objects are always painted in ways that invoke the rhetoric of modern painting, from Impressionism to Color Field painting, or from the crusty surfaces of postwar Informel to the hefty gestures of Abstract Expressionism. Genzken's assemblages, too, often look like the artist spray-painted them in expressive or impetuous gestures; colorful adhesive tape or clothes slung over the assemblages sometimes stand in for painting properly speaking. So although Harrison's and Genzken's works have left the narrow frame of the flat painted panel far behind—their fully realized three-dimensionality leaves no doubt of that—they

articulate a "painterly" aspiration that ties them back to painting as a formation or more precisely, as a historically established set of conventions.[37] It makes sense that curators and critics now sometimes treat them as a version of painting, as in the 2016 exhibition "Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age" at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich, where a window dummy by Genzken dressed in a painted shirt (*Untitled*, 2012) and Harrison's *Sculpture with Raincoat* (2012), a piece slathered in reds and blues, were flatly categorized as paintings. That's an astonishing sleight of hand, requiring an extraordinarily elastic conception of painting, one by which ultimately anything—any object with paint on it—can be a painting. But why are Harrison's and Genzken's anthropomorphic assemblages included in the sacred halls of painting?

First and foremost, it is the use of color that enriches these objects with painterly potential. More specifically, effects traditionally associated with color such as the semblance of animation or motion reinforces the anthropomorphic traits of the two artists' works. Color, after all, has always been a "defining feature of life," as Anita Albus has written:[38] it can lend dead matter the appearance of being animate. So the primary objective of the recourse to a painterly repertoire in Genzken and Harrison would be to energize the animistic dimension of their art. Color, moreover, is at the root of painting's ability to touch its viewer, to address him or her directly and elicit an affective response, as Daniel Arasse has rightly noted.[39] In the work of Harrison and Genzken, psychological implications of the applications of color are central to the objects' being perceived variously as damaged,[40] psychotic,[41] or mentally disturbed.[42]

In Genzken's *Schauspieler* (*Actors*, 2012) the mannequins, with their eccentrically tattered getups, mirrored sunglasses, and vivaciously colored clothes, manifestly try to live up to the demand for bold self-presentation in our neoliberal economy. But *Schauspieler* also demonstrates to the viewer that the doomed attempt to be "fully functional" in that type of economy takes its toll. So to look at them is to contemplate a familiar quandary. But that's also where I think the problem lies: prompting associations with borderline-personality disorder or the "weariness of the self,"[43] these figures court

the viewer's identification with them.[44] They relate to states of mind we're all familiar with. Instead of thwarting facile identification, instead of confronting us as truly other, they prod us to contemplate our own lives. What's more of an issue is that they misrepresent social problems as individual inadequacies, a distortion of realities that's commonplace today. The focus is on the subject, be it damaged, psychotic, or afflicted with a personality disorder, distracting from the social structures that engineer such subjects. This fixation on subjective states and blindness to the social conditions that produce them, I think, needs further discussion.

Art and the Subject— A Reciprocal Relationship

The idea that a work of art is structurally analogous to a living subject is hardly new, but the idea was anathema to modernist critics like Michael Fried. Fried insisted that it was essential for art to transcend subjectivity. In his essay "Art and Subjecthood" (1967), he harshly criticized the "latent or hidden [...] anthropomorphism" he detected at the heart of Minimalist sculpture.[45] He experienced the works of artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris—pieces whose dimensions were patently chosen with the human body in mind, leaving no doubt about their reference to subjectivity—as "surrogate person[s]" that blatantly, even aggressively, imposed their quasi subjectivity on him: "Being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another *person*."[46] That these objects conducted themselves like people—or like characters in a play—gave him a feeling of physical discomfort. And it's not a big step from person to quasi subject. Fried's phobic response was triggered primarily by Minimalism's central innovation: art that projects an embodied counterpart and aims to involve him or her. As a modernist who clung to the mythical idea of a "continuous and entire presentness" of the work, Fried categorically refused to become involved.[47] It was years later before Georges Didi-Huberman rehabilitated the "basically anthropomorphic nature" of Minimal art.[48] With palpable enthusiasm, he noted

that the "abrupt" or "forceful" bearing of Judd's non-relational "specific objects" imperceptibly transmuted them into subjects.[49] Whereas Fried was put off by objects that seemed to engage the viewer, Didi-Huberman gave them credit for attaining a kind of subjectivity by virtue of their dimensions and emphasis on interaction.

My misgivings about anthropomorphism in Minimalist-inspired contemporary art concern a different point. I don't share Fried's phobic rejection of the interactive aspect in art, but I also think that Didi-Huberman's animation axiom is questionable. It's one thing to note that works of art act like subjects and another to flatly declare them to be subjects, as Didi-Huberman does, because that obscures their material origin as well as the conditions of their production, their history. That's why I believe it's indispensable that we address the subject-like quality of recent contemporary art as an open problem, examining it in light of a neoliberal economy that treats subjects as a resource and so animates them to incessantly invest in themselves.[50]

Bodies, Identities, and the Human Figure

As is well known, Minimalism subscribed to an industrial aesthetic to counter the impression that the works associated with it were charged with personal or subjective experience. The Post-Minimalists of the late 1960s and early '70s, by contrast, nudged the spotlight back toward the personal and subjective dimension of their art. Consider, for example, Eva Hesse's *Sans II* (1968), which combines the Minimalist principle of seriality with a materiality reminiscent of fragile and porous bodies for a not altogether "impersonal" look. Another example of how these artists charged the formal idiom of Minimalism with personal issues and physicality would be Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972): lying beneath a wooden ramp, the artist masturbated, as though to literally reinject the repressed sexual aspect into Minimal art. In the 1980s and early '90s, Janine Antoni, Mike Kelley, and others took this subjectivization of the Minimalist rhetoric further by intertwining it with identity politics or ideological critique. Antoni's *Gnaw* (1992), comprising visibly chewed

blocks—one made of chocolate and the other of lard—confronted the Minimalist cube with the artist's sexual identity and obsessive behavior, whereas Kelley's *Craft Morphology Flow Chart* (1991–92) reminded the viewer of the fact that the rigid and ostensibly neutral aesthetic of Minimalism was actually part and parcel of a repressive social order that meted out discipline and punishment.

Since the new millennium, numerous artists have contributed to another revival of the Minimalist rhetoric, but their concern is less with identity politics or ideological critique than with employing a Minimalist formal language to suggest the presence of an absent human figure. This shift toward figuration by way of Minimalism, I would argue, is the shared feature of works as different as Michaela Meise's *Liegende* (2007), Kai Althoff's *Solo für eine befallene Trompete* (2005), and Tom Burr's *Addict-Love* (2008). Genzken's and Harrison's early assemblages—I'm thinking in particular of Genzken's show at the Secession in Vienna in 2006 and Harrison's *Pasquale Paoli* (2007)—evince the same tendency toward an anthropomorphic adaptation of the Minimalist convention, a tendency that has gradually gained momentum over the intervening decade.

Latent Anthropomorphism

Genzken's early works, whose primary reference was unmistakably to architecture, prompted the viewer to endow them with human-like qualities. Yet the anthropomorphism of, say, the columns she created between 1994 and 2003 was fairly latent; in the assemblages of the past ten years, by contrast, it's pretty salient. The column picked up on a central format in Minimal art that surfaces, for example, in Robert Morris's "Columns" series (1961–73) and the work of Anne Truitt. The rectangular wood, copper, aluminum, glass, and mirror glass panels in various dimensions Genzken mounted on the surfaces of her columns likewise patently communicated with the Minimalist convention. Their latent anthropomorphism, meanwhile, derived from the titles the artist chose for them. Some were named after Genzken's artist friends: *Wolfgang* (1998) for Wolfgang Tillmans, *Dan* (1999) for Dan Graham, *Kai* (2000) for Kai Althoff. One of them—

Isa (2000)—bore the artist's own name, signaling her exceptional status as the only woman amid a constellation of men. Most basically, what lent these objects the semblance of subjects was the fact that they were titled—perhaps we should say *baptized*—after living people. They also challenged the viewer to relate to them, to approach them as one would a person: one had to walk around them to examine their different aspects and multifaceted surface treatments. Each column had a different "skin," a unique "face." And with the mirror elements, to look at them was to feel uncannily assimilated into the work, as though one's body were inscribed into the object's own bodily volume. What these pieces staged was a face-to-face encounter between two persons.

Ghostly Presence

The encounter with the human figure is more explicit in Genzken's works from the 2000s, such as *Oil XV* (2007), that incorporate mannequins and small plastic figurines. The latter already feature in *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death* (2003), which includes a set of twenty-two assemblages. Quoting Theodor W. Adorno, we might describe these pieces as literal "representatives of the total social subject."[51] Unlike her columns, the action figurines don't just invite us to read human traits into them but they are genuine simulacra of the human figure, plastic figures that are replicas of human beings in miniature. Other works, such as the untitled wheelchair sculptures Genzken has made since 2006, dispense with the figurines or mannequins but still prompt us to complete them by supplying the presence of an absent human in our mind's eye. It feels virtually impossible not to project an image of people sitting in the wheelchairs—an association evoked by the lengths of colorful fabric loosely slung over them, which also heighten the impression of dynamism. The luminous colors of the textiles, too, exude vitality.

Harrison's work confronts us with similar suggestions of human figuration. See, for instance, her installation *Trees for the Forest* (2007), a labyrinthine arrangement of custom-built pedestals, found objects and thrift-store portraits. The art historian George Baker

has aptly characterized the overall impression of the installation, writing that it consisted of "sculptural objects masquerading as people."[52] The more Harrison's and Genzken's works draw on the Minimalist formal repertoire, the clearer their propensity becomes to populate the gallery with people, perhaps even quasi subjects, in various disguises. Then again, the forms of Minimalism have lately been complemented both in Genzken's and, even more markedly, in Harrison's art with mannequins (Genzken) and abstract forms (Harrison).

Isa Genzken, *Untitled*, 2006

Self-Acting Painting

The latent anthropomorphism of the objects is amplified by the treatment of their surfaces: Harrison generally paints hers, while Genzken uses spray paint, as well as foils and tapes. These techniques invoke the rhetoric of painting in a way that reinforces the suggestion of an animate quasi subject. In Genzken's oeuvre, the application of a modernist palette goes back to her "Columns," such as those she presented at Kunstverein Braunschweig in 2000, where it appeared in the form of tinted metal and mirrored panels mounted on the objects. These claddings seemed to make them "sculptural bodies in real space," as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh once put it.[53] In the assemblages Genzken created for the 2007 edition of Skulptur Projekte Münster, the colorful sunshades and umbrellas likewise appeared to function as a sort of pictorial ground for "figures"—dolls ostensibly maltreated and disfigured in a variety of ways, such as by spray-painting their heads with "dead" silver paint. Here, it is the use of color that identifies the quasi subject as a victim of abuse.

The surfaces of Harrison's earlier objects—see, for instance, *Trees for the Forest* and *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (2007)—likewise feature painterly gestures reminiscent of Impressionism or Abstract Expressionism. A shift toward a painting style with equally bright colors but scabby surfaces is apparent in more recent pieces such as *Lazy Hardware* (2012), an amorphous, seemingly formless abstract shape that would seem to owe its morphology to some sort of creatural energy, which is underlined by bloody reds. The masses of *Mastro Lindo* (2012)—consisting of wood, cement, and polystyrene—also bulge as though swelled by some vital force surging within them that lends them the appearance of self-action. In analogy with the agency painters have long attributed to their medium, the object's morphology here suggests that it has generated itself. Then again, painting sometimes turns up in Harrison's assemblages in the quite conventional form of an integrated canvas, as in *Wandering Jew* (2012) that includes includes a painted zone executed in colorful vigorously abstract strokes, an example in which the role of painting in her art is blatantly obvious.

In Genzken's case, virtually all of her assemblages from *Schwules Baby* (1997) onward have been painted all over or coated with a layer of spray paint, aligning her work with graffiti art as well as the convention of 1960s California spray painting. Tinted foils applied to surfaces sometimes stand in for coats of paint; in other assemblages, the adhesive tape that divides their surfaces is operationally equivalent to brushstrokes organizing the picture plane.[54] The literature on Genzken's oeuvre has largely ignored the ubiquity of painterly codes or else interpreted them as a beautification measure. For instance, writing about *Schwules Baby*, Laura Hoptman, who curated the retrospective at MoMA, wrote that the fluorescent spray paint these relief sculptures had been "bombed with" led to their "embellishment."[55] By contrast, I would argue that the bright spray paint, and also the tape, foils, and streaks of paint that were used for the objects that compose *Fuck the Bauhaus* (2000) aim not so much at the beautification of but the activation of the vitalistic potential of color.

Color adds urgency to the claim these models lodge to being true to life and their request to be brought to life, while conversely making them appear more alive. Genzken also harnesses the specific qualities of paint as a substance, as seen with the "shirts" and "jackets" that have been slathered or soaked with paint in her 1998 works, in which the materiality of paint produces a positively bodily presence—even without a wearer. One of the numerous portraits of the artist by Wolfgang Tillmans (*Isa Mona Lisa*, 1999) shows her dressed in one of these pieces—silver, blue, and red paint give it real heft—as though to literally fill it with life and crank up the suggestion of vitality. The portrait unmistakably signals that painting, in Genzken's oeuvre, is above all about effects of animation.

Both Genzken's and Harrison's art represents an *expanded* form of painting that has left its traditional place, the painted canvas, far behind—painting without painting. I would nonetheless argue that it is the ubiquity of the rhetoric of painting that fuels the impression that these two artists' works are possessed of a kind of subjectivity.

Painterly Gestures in an Anti-modernist Setting

It might be objected, not unreasonably, that these multimedia installations have nothing to do with painting in any strict sense. Are they not much rather expressions of the widely debated "post-medium condition," as Rosalind E. Krauss has labeled a state of affairs defined by the multiplicity of media and the instability of the boundaries between them?[56] There is no doubt that the installations hybridize various media. Still, I would argue that it is painting, in the sense of a specific rhetoric with particular substantial signifiers, that Genzken's and Harrison's works mobilize.

Harrison's *Al Gore* (2007), a rough-hewn block that is higher than the height of a tall person, exemplifies such painterly specificity embedded in a non-medium-specific installation. It is dappled with green, dark red, pink, and yellow in a style that, as David Joselit has noted, recalls Impressionism, but "without falling into camp reenactment," which would make it an ironic gesture.[57] I think Joselit's basic intuition is right: the artist's use of the painterly codes of Impressionism is indeed sincere. But how are we to understand the art world's receptiveness to this unironic revival of Impressionist gestures, as illustrated by the recent institutional accolades for Harrison's works? As I see it, the intermedia, theatrical, anti-modernist nature of her installations is what makes modernist painterly gestures palatable that would elicit skepticism in a panel painting. The same overt theatricality that Fried held in such contempt would seem to immunize Harrison's installations against the suspicion of being traditional modern painting.

By contradistinction, the painterly gestures in Genzken's work allow for the impurity of painting. More specifically, her assemblages highlight the fact that codes of painting have long migrated into other domains—graphic design, club culture, graffiti—where they are given new purposes and instrumentalized. The use of tinted metal foils, spray paint, or adhesive tape in pieces such as *Memorial Tower* (2008) makes no secret of its roots in graphic design. It might be argued that Genzken treats even the tape like pigment, or that

the way she throws various fabrics over her assemblages is an expressive gesture; take, for instance, the "Wind" series (2009), in which textiles appear to add motion, which is to say, animation to the objects, endowing them with a semblance of life. Yet however much these ostensibly expressive gestures remind us that painting has incorporated the principle of subjectivity,[58] they also—and this is where Genzken's art differs from Harrison's—confront us with the loss of this potential. Genzken's work leaves no doubt that painterly traditions, having been adopted and adapted by popular design, are no longer to be had in pure form.

Damaged and Importunate Subjects

It's necessary to consider what sort of subjectivity we encounter in these quasi subjects, or more precisely, which conception of the subject they promote. The subjects the pieces purport to be are manifestly neither unified nor sovereign and in control; on the contrary, they are distinctly impaired and disfigured, which calls their autonomy in question on a symbolic level. The frequency with which mannequins, masks, and celebrity portraits appear in both artists' oeuvres—see Genzken's *Straßenfest* (*Street Party*, 2008–9) or Harrison's *Alexander the Great* (2007)—suggests that these are damaged subjects whose autonomy is perpetually under threat.

As mentioned, Genzken and Harrison are not the only artists to use window dummies; see, for example, Heimo Zobernig's *Untitled* (2008), David Lieske's *Imperium in Imperio (Domestic Scene I)* (2010), and John Miller's *My Friend* (1989), to mention but a few. Mannequins are found in a lot of contemporary art, an echo of the omnipresence of dolls in Dada and Surrealism, which I don't think is coincidental: then as now, they emphasize the structural kinship between the work of art and the commodity—both the mannequin and the art piece are integral elements of commercial displays. But the current popularity of the window dummy also strikes me as connected to the conditions of life in the neoliberal economy, in which products increasingly take on human traits, as when they come to life as individual brands in their own right, while people conversely

fit ever more neatly into the product mold, as in the widely discussed phenomenon of self-branding. In more abstract terms, the aspects I've discussed—the emphasis on animation through the use of painting, the Minimalist elements, and anthropomorphism—are expressions of the changed role in which this new economy casts the subject.

Products with Human Features

Sociologists have proposed various theoretical models to describe this neoliberal economy more precisely.[59] Its defining feature is said to be the systematic integration and exploitation of individual life and human resources broadly conceived.[60] In other words, the neoliberal economy seeks to control, master, and extract aliveness. Unlike in the past, when it was our labor capacity and our bodies that were subject to exploitation, it is now our affects and desires that the new form of capitalism is after—our subjectivity, even our very lives.

The mannequin seems to be an emblematic embodiment of this situation in which the boundary between product and person becomes blurry: it is a product with human features. But what are we to make of the fact that, as in Genzken's *Schauspieler*, the dolls often appear out of control, collapsing in on themselves or getting out of hand? How should we read the fact that the artist's window dummies and cheap plastic figurines frequently look like they are in bad shape, as if they have suffered demonstrative acts of abuse and defacement? In the Skulptur Projekte Münster, for example, she left her baby dolls without a roof over their heads, exposing them to the weather and other possible dangers. As I see it, these maltreated figures remind us of the old psychoanalytical insight that the subject is not the master in its own house. Yet they also solicit our identification with their pathological and deficient condition and their inner strife.

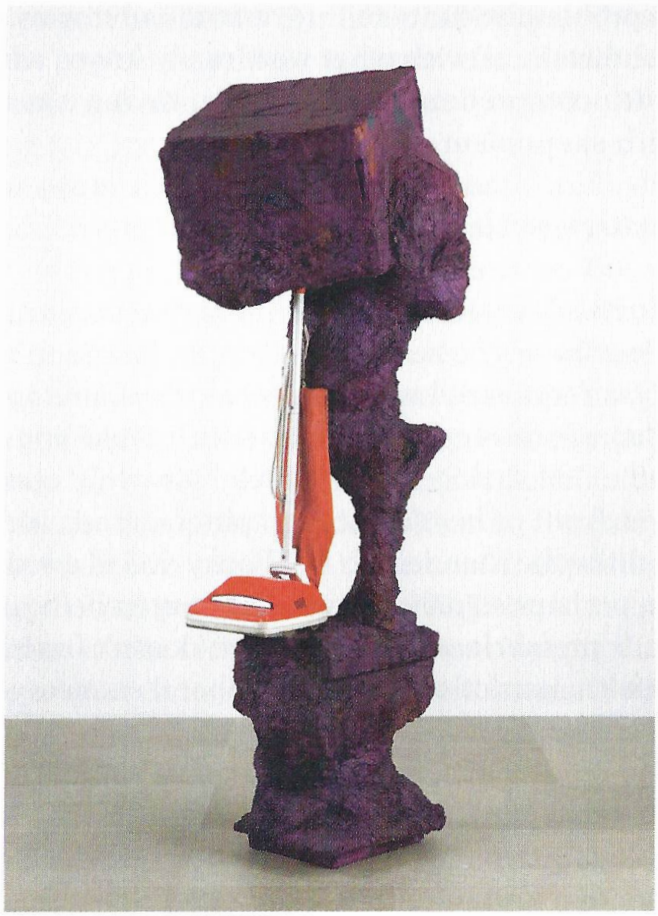
We might go further and say that it's precisely because they appear as precarious borderline subjects that trigger a sense of intimate familiarity in the viewer. After all, today's "new psychic

economy," as Alain Ehrenberg has called it, relentlessly exhorts us to nurture our pathologies.[61] That's perhaps why Harrison has recently accessorized many of her quasi subjects with psychiatric medications and substances, such as energy drinks, that large numbers of people consume to keep up with the fast pace of the economy and to make life bearable under such conditions. In other words, these works *tell stories of* a state we're only too familiar with and go through at times—the feeling that we're not cohesive subjects, that we're at the mercy of conditions that seek to domesticate our subjectivities. So instead of confronting us with something truly other, something that does not submit to our tendency to make everything about ourselves—which is what art ideally does—they prompt us to reflect on conditions we're acquainted with. Critics have universally praised the narrative tendency of Genzken's and Harrison's art and have seen no problem with its telling of familiar stories.[62] But when works of art entertain us with what we already know, when they confront us with comprehensive narratives, we have reason to also view them with skepticism.

Readymades with a Human Face

Similar to Genzken's wheelchair sculptures that conjure up the presence of people who might be sitting in them, Harrison's *Perth Amboy* (2001), a room-sized work that comprises photographs, sculptural assemblages, and a cardboard labyrinth including a Becky Friend of Barbie doll sitting in her wheelchair while contemplating a picture hung in front of her (a photograph of a green screen taken by the artist). Like the mannequin the Becky doll is a readymade with a human face, perhaps signaling to us that human beings are a kind of readymade, a prefabricated product that doesn't function perfectly and must live with restrictions in the neoliberal economy. Similarly, the Slim-Fast container balanced atop Harrison's *Fats Domino* (2006) is a humanized readymade, figuring as a quasi subject's "head," albeit a rather small one. In this instance, the readymade serves both as a vehicle of figuration and as a narrative device—the diet shake container of course also hints at a story of today's obsession with

weight loss. Such narrative activation of the readymade is a characteristic feature of Harrison's art: the protein powder in *Syntha-6* (2012) gestures toward addiction to physical exercise, while the vacuum cleaner in the assemblage *All in the Family* (2012) turns the sculpture into one of the ubiquitous but invisible workers who keep the art space spotlessly clean.[63] As John Roberts has persuasively argued,[64] the point of Duchamp's readymade was to transpose the labor of others—manufacture workers—into artistic labor. In Harrison, by contrast, the readymade's specific properties as a product matter. Instead of fusing different labor spheres—social and creative labor—it is taken literally. And as the world of labor recedes into the background, the readymade emerges as a central figurative element in a narrative fabric.



Rachel Harrison, *All in the Family*, 2012

Structural Change—
When Artworks Are Traded Like Subjects

Finally, I believe that by performing like quasi subjects that behave like subjects, Genzken's and Harrison's works also reflect a structural change. As I showed in my book *High Price* (2009), the commercial art world, formerly a business dominated by relatively small retail trades, underwent a transformation starting in the late 1990s and turned into an "industry producing visuality and meaning."[65] In its transactions, this industry has increasingly tended to treat artworks as though they were human beings: at auctions, in particular, calling objects to be sold "a Koons" or "a Hirst" is standard parlance. This personalization of works of art also registers the collectors' fantasy that purchasing a piece by an artist gives them immediate access to the creator's life and person. In a sense, they buy people. Harrison's and Genzken's quasi subjects seem to intensify and exaggerate this situation in which artworks are treated as if they were persons.

There's another possible reading: that these anthropomorphic sculptures quote the old ideal of the living work of art and carry it to excess,its distortion a reflection of the new pressures of the neoliberal economy. After all, the mannequins do exactly what the legendary artist is expected to do in a media society: to construct a compelling persona and present him- or herself in a favorable light. The implantation of media in all domains of social life after the Second World War has only added to this pressure on artists, and not only on them, to perform a compelling self. Such performance crucially depends on the right apparel, a fact brought home by the colorful rain capes, reflective vests, and oversized sportswear on Genzken's "actors."[66] Harrison's *Sculpture with Raincoat* (2012), too, leaves no doubt that it's the clothes that make the man. The painted form's suggestion of a human figure largely depends on the red raincoat it is "wearing."

In a sense, Genzken has outsourced this work of self-presentation to her actors, reducing the burden on her. The artist, an "exhausted self" if ever there was one, at the end of her communicative rope and

suffering from networking fatigue, sends a proxy out onto the stage of life. Hence, perhaps, the impression that some of these figures are Genzken's alter egos: one, *Untitled* (2012), presents a portrait photograph of the artist at eye level, while others wear hats emblazoned with the letters "Isa." Each of these actors, we might say, contains a piece of the artist, who fields them, but also hides behind them.

Subjectivity— The New Currency

As surrogates, these quasi subjects also confront us with the kind of subjectivity—battle-weary, incapable of functioning without the help of psychiatric medications—that figures as a currency in today's new economy. The neoliberal economy, rather than exploiting merely our labor, more comprehensively extracts value from our entire personalities, our emotions, our social relations, and other formerly noneconomic aspects of our lives. Faced with a new technique of power that is utterly invested in subjectivity and seeks to infiltrate it, Harrison's and Genzken's sculptures seem to provide exactly what's very much in demand right now: subjectivity as a product. Yet it's hard to tell whether these works merely cater to the new desire for theatrical subjectivity or limn its overdrawn reflection to shine a light on the problems this new economy creates. What seems beyond doubt, however, is that these disfigured quasi-human assemblages restage the story of the pathological and damaged subject, a narrative we're only too familiar with. Never before has the media reported so much about burnout, depression, and borderline symptoms, which means that the general public is familiar with these phenomena, a knowledge Genzken's and Harrison's anthropomorphic figures invoke and illustrate. So instead of desubjectivizing art and turning it into a kind of epistemological investigation, as Duchamp and the Conceptualists did in different ways, these two artists confront us with objects whose subject-like qualities make them resemble magical relics, an art that makes no secret of its kinship with the sacred art objects. Ensouled fetishes, at once

lifeless and full of life, their works invite us to recognize our own likeness in them, an image of our subjective condition in the neoliberal economy. The price both artists pay for this focus on the subjective, however, is that they forgo an analysis of the social conditions that push the subject to its limits and bring about its collapse. Instead, it is painting that provides a material basis for our vitalistic projections of subjectivity. The use of painterly gestures obviously always has social implications.