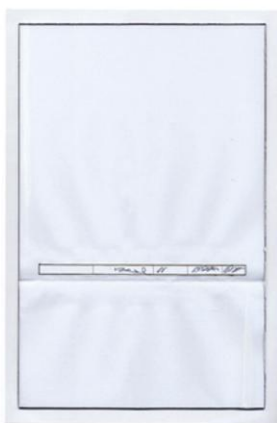


Lingen, Germany Reviews

Marieta Chirulescu

KUNSTHALLE LINGEN



Marieta Chirulescu, *Untitled*, 2014,
ink-jet print and gesso on canvas, 68 7/8 ×
45 1/4".

Some of Marieta Chirulescu's pictures—created in finely nuanced pale hues of gray, with faint efflorescences of color that revealed themselves only on a second or third glance—seemed to fade into the spacious white cube of Kunsthalle Lingen. Chirulescu, who was born in Sibiu, Romania, lives in Berlin, and received the Twenty-First Lingener Kunstpreis for painting in 2014. Hers is a uniquely reflective approach to painting: Working with scanners, laser prints, photocopies, collages, and occasionally brush and paint, she interweaves the discourse on the conditions of painting with a broader exploration of her media—and then translates her findings back into painting. Her pictures appear to speak the language of classical abstraction, yet the layer of paint applied to the canvas often lacks any texture, and many of the seemingly abstract surfaces have a basis in physical objects: We can make out snippets of paper and shreds of printed forms, as well as more abstract elements such as mirrors and glass panes. The resulting works, with their equivocal representational status, hybridization of visual techniques in multiple media, and amalgamation of abstraction and iconicity, combine alluring ambiguity with inscrutable austerity.

In keeping with this hermeticism, the seventeen works here were all *Untitled* and the show was simply named after the artist. The pièce de résistance was a group of seven new works, all 2014, installed at the center of the room. Hung unusually low, with their top edges aligned, the paintings unfolded a subtle interplay of diversified surfaces, material effects, and feigned serialism. Four were rendered in starkly muted tones and three were white monochromes. To make the white paintings, Chirulescu first applied a coat of black paint to loose swaths of canvas so that, once the material stretched over frames, the pigment showed the kinks, creases, and wrinkles that were in the fabric before it was stretched. She then masked the sides and a few inches along the edges of the front of the panels with tape and painted the canvas white again, creating paintings whose monochromatic fabric texture stands out on a white wall almost only as a black contour.

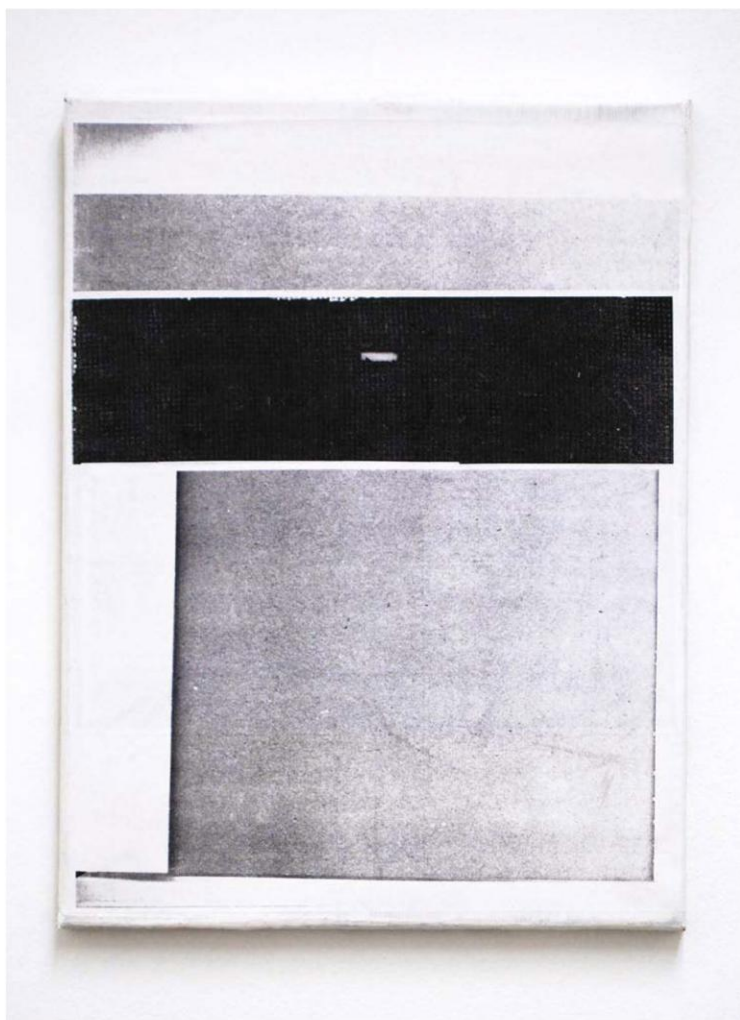
The other four new paintings take up these principles of physical presence and framing—and transform them: A fine line runs parallel to all four of each work's edges, and each painting bears a sort of wide label affixed across its lower part. In the area around these lines, some of which show traces of abstract notational gestures reminiscent of handwriting, the surface is puckered like paper curling from moisture. Initially, it is hard to see how these pictures were made, or what they actually show. Formally speaking, they might be reductive and etiolated paraphrases on Rothko. In reality, they are based on scans of improvised collages: In each case, a label was pasted on a sheet of paper, which was then pressed beneath a pane of glass, producing a rippling network of flattened folds; Chirulescu scanned this object and transferred enlarged laser prints onto canvases. In the reproductions, the glass at first reads not as a real object but as a flat line enclosing a pale color field. Looking more closely, we can decode clues such as the paint residues on the edge of the glass that appear in several of the pictures. The medium of reproduction itself, too, has left its traces; bands that result from scanning errors and the minute, colorful solarization effects that occur when glass is scanned come to play an active part in the compositional process. Chirulescu's pictures unfurl a heterogeneous and multilayered pictorial reality: By coupling and blending digital and analog techniques, she has devised a novel way to restore uniqueness to painting in the age of its reproducibility.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

In Marieta Chirulescu's abstract admixtures of media, painting seems simultaneously alive and dead

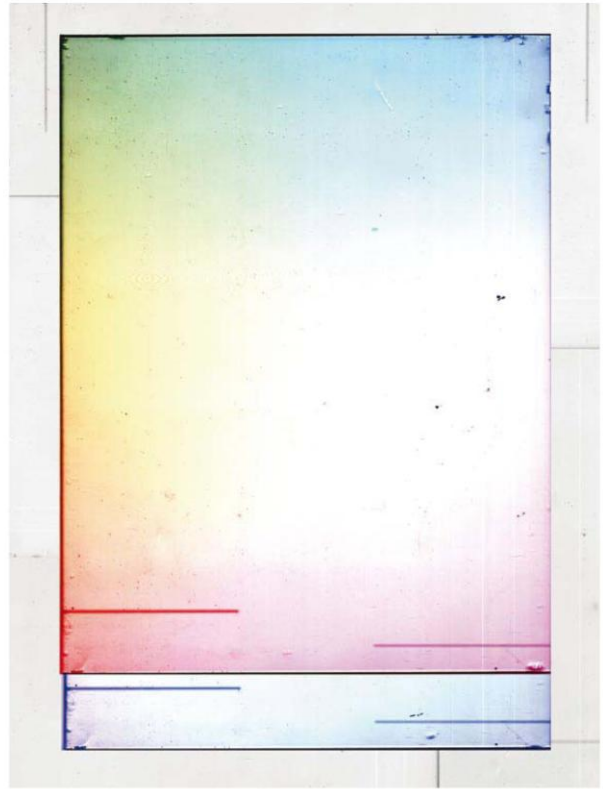
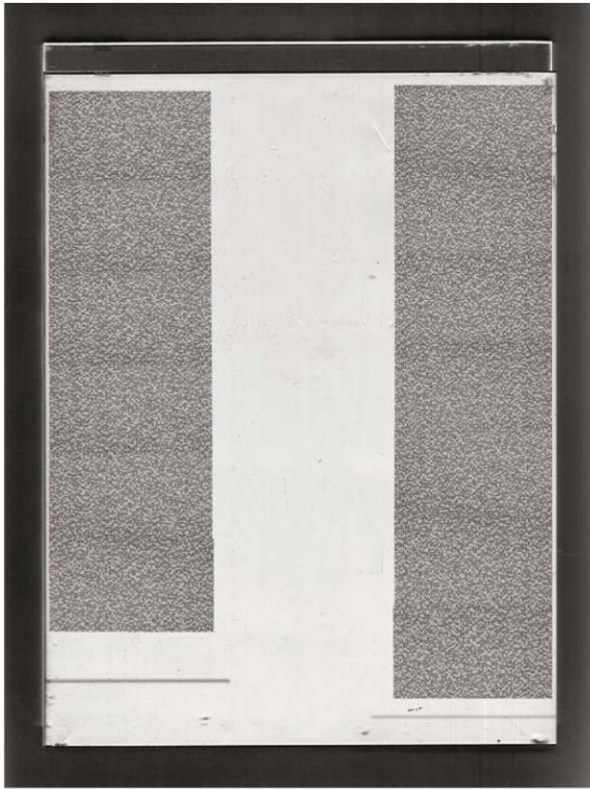


THIS JANUARY, towards the end of my meeting with Marieta Chirulescu, we discovered a kindred fascination with borders. Not the kind that wars are fought to alter; rather the kind that bound paintings and images off from the rest of the world. For the Romanian Chirulescu, who emigrated with her family to Germany in 1992 and moved to Berlin after graduating from school in Nuremberg in 2008, the interest in borders went back to the Eastern European art and architecture books of her childhood, in which images, due to poor printing quality and techniques, were often badly reproduced, skewed and misaligned, such that a border became apparent. For me it was more a fetishisation of the secular abstraction of Robert Ryman and, say, the early chromatic panels of Brice Marden. Yet in both cases, our fascination was (and is) indirectly linked to questions of materiality, process and illusion – all of which essentially inform Chirulescu's pictorial practice.

A painter, photographer and printmaker (for lack of a better term) all rolled into one, Chirulescu gracefully blurs the distinctions that generally keep these media apart. Indeed, even when pressed, it can be hard to categorise Chirulescu's works, and recourse must often be made to an exhibition list in order to clarify any doubts, although such clarification hardly accounts for process. Perhaps it would be more accurate to list the techniques Chirulescu is known to use: painting, photography, Photoshop

and photocopying, in no particular order. The artist, however, doesn't seem to be interested in mere *trompe l'oeil* or technological legerdemain, nor does she seem to be taken by technology for the sake of technology, even if a Wade Guyton-esque appreciation of its misuse and consequent errors is apparent in her work. Rather, her indiscriminate marrying of media seems to come from a more organic and integrated place, in which said techniques are made to conspire dynamically to the ends of her unorthodox palette. Nevertheless, as already suggested, Chirulescu's spare, quasi-administrative abstractions, which generate atmospheres ranging from a kind of tenebrous elegance to a luminous and candid sophistication, are still very much engaged in questions of materiality, process and even illusion.

Take, for instance, the business with borders, a motif, so to speak, that dominated the artist's recent solo show at Galerie Micky Schubert, in Berlin. There, works such as *Off*, *Block* and *Bandit* (all 2010) played with the graduating grey negative space of the photocopier (usually the byproduct of accidentally copying too large or off-kilter), shifting that void from the



words *CHRIS SHARP*

margins towards the middle, thereby creating a marginal centre. Meanwhile other pieces stayed within a more traditional understanding of pictorial borders, going on to frame themselves in a variety of ways. *Mixed Gradients 1.5* (2010), for example, a mounted c-print whose bright and airy interior resembled a citrus-hued Photoshop colouring palette, was contained by a thin black border, itself bounded by a fat white margin, while *Jeans* (2010), a small oil on canvas, consisted of a thin wash of denim-blue, full of subtle blue cross-hatchings hovering on a black ground with soft black margins.

Each work, and the media fluidly enlisted in the cause of its composition, is made very much on a unique and individual basis. And yet for all their particularity, these works all display a propensity both to show and dissimulate the hand of the artist: now you see it, now you don't. Even then, though, this effect is more a byproduct of Chirulescu's working method and sensibility than it is an end in itself. Because one thing that sets her manipulation of technology apart from that of her like-minded peers (including the aforementioned Guyton, Kelley Walker and Das Institut), is the

weirdly organic edge she brings to it, generated in large part by her ability to invest each work with a spectral sense of process, or even the spectral *tout court*. (Another way to read the border is as simply demarcating an absence, functional as a penumbral index of missing content.) Indeed, painted or not, there is something haunting about these works, as if they themselves were 'paintings' haunted by painting, full of a rarefied and morbid beauty, like some kind of symbolist abstraction.

Incidentally, Yve-Alain Bois ends his famous essay 'Painting: The Task of Mourning' (1986) by quoting the Austrian writer Robert Musil: 'If some painting is still to come, if painters are still to come, they will not come from where we expect them to.' Paradoxically, Chirulescu's work both fulfils and disproves this prophecy, in that where it comes from – Photoshop, the camera, the photocopier, etc – is both unexpected (by virtue of not being paint) and expected (less and less paint is being enlisted in the cause of postpainterly abstraction), at this point. But it is in using these normally removed, nonhuman media that she manages to enact a *mise en abyme* of the death of painting, bringing it very much to life. ■

this page, from left: *Bandit*, 2010, photocopy and oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm; *Block*, 2010, c-print, 40 x 31 cm. Both courtesy the artist and Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin

facing page: *Mixed Gradients 1.5.*, 2010, c-print on alu-dibond, 69 x 53 cm, edition of 3 + 2AP. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin