

NO NEUTRAL GROUND

Claudia Djabbari
Christian Flamm
Melanie Manchot

Curated by Wiebke Gronemeyer

12 October to 20 October 2011

German Ambassador's Residence, Belgrave Square, London SW1

Biographies

Claudia Djabbari is a German/Iranian sculptor, installation- and multimedia artist currently living and working in London. After studying at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, the Munich Art Academy, and Goldsmiths College, London, her work has been exhibited internationally. Most recently she organized and participated in *Perverted Minimalism*, a group show that toured from Duesseldorf to Munich, London, and Leipzig in 2010 and 2011. Her work was also shown in *Matter of Principle*, Art Mur Montreal, Canada, and *The Nightingale and The Rose*, Kunsthalle Munich, Germany, in 2011 and formed part of the Aichi Triennale 2010 in Nagoya, Japan.

Christian Flamm is an artist living in London.

Melanie Manchot gained her MA in Fine Art Photography from the Royal College of Art. Since then her work has been exhibited internationally with recent solo shows at The Whitechapel Gallery (2009 and 2010) London, Goff and Rosenthal, New York (2007) and Galerie m, Bochum, Germany (2011 and 2007). Manchot has participated in numerous biennales, most recently in the 52nd La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2007), Thessaloniki Biennial and Istanbul Biennial (both 2009). She will be showing new work at Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (Exhibition: Wunder, 22 September 2011 - 5 February 2012) and Nuit Blanche, Paris (1 October 2011) as well as presenting a solo show at Fabrica, Brighton (7 October - 28 November 2011).

Wiebke Gronemeyer studied philosophy, cultural studies and curatorial practice in Witten/Herdecke (Germany) and London. She works as a curator and writer in Hamburg and London, where she is currently working on her PhD in the Art Department at Goldsmiths College. Most recently she curated Stian Adlandsvik and Lutz-Rainer Mueller: *Still Life with Modern Guilt* at MOT International, London, and co-curated *In the Event of Suspicion*, a group show at the Bielefelder Kunstverein in Bielefeld, Germany, in 2010.

Exhibition Tours

with curator Wiebke Gronemeyer:

Thursday, 13th October 2011, 12.30 am and 3.30pm

Friday, 13th October, 3.30pm

Thursday, 20th October, 12.30am and 3.30pm

Booking under ku-s1@lond.auswaertiges-amt.de is essential.

Acknowledgements

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The exhibition NO NEUTRAL GROUND, curated by Wiebke Gronemeyer, presents new works by London-based artists Claudia Djabbari, Christian Flamm, and Melanie Manchot that were specifically conceived for the space of the German Ambassador's Residence at Belgrave Square in London. In a house that is already defined as German, how can art escape the fate of becoming a representational gesture? In a space that is highly biased both physically and ideologically, how can art situate itself with its individual conceptual identity while remaining context-specific in a non-confirmative but critical dimension?

Investigating the notion that contemporary art provides a space of reflection for culture and identity, the exhibition specifically engages with the space of the German Embassy in London. Avoiding the lure of thematic categorization and programmatic classification, NO NEUTRAL GROUND takes the production of representational identities in contemporary artistic practice as its departure point. The exhibition provides an opportunity to further the understanding of art's function as a global signifier in relation to its history of origins and the terms of cultural exchange that condition its production. This is particularly relevant during Frieze when the international circuit of contemporary art meets in London in order to demonstrate its global understanding of art and culture.

The artists' installations explore the possibility of positioning identities in such a way as to question the forms of identity representation in contemporary art and culture. In a context that is prescribed to a specific culture and nationality, the works on view exemplify moments of hesitation, interruption and revision of what might be expected in regards to showcasing an identity. The installations by Claudia Djabbari, Christian Flamm, and Melanie Manchot can be described as revealing a precisely calculated form of reserve and an implementation of reflexivity as a requirement to engage with concepts of cultural or national identity. Particularly in the context of the ongoing debate around art and its relationship to national demarcations, the artists question whether art can remain independent of a national idea, or if in such a context as NO NEUTRAL GROUND the national idea is immanently attributed to it. In the context of this exhibition 'nation' is not only to be understood as a political term by definition, but also as a form of identification in cultural and social terms whose function of acting as a framework for the production of contemporary art is being reviewed.

In their works the artists address multiple forms of identity perception that cannot simply be located within the boundary of a nation, but instead exist in between national or cultural demarcations. The works create a space of negotiation in which various historical, social, political, and cultural identities meet, entering into a critical dialogue that is often riddled with conflict.

Perfect Mountain (2011) is a series of photos and a film with which Melanie Manchot portrays the exploration of identity as a meticulously constructed image. While the film reveals the arrangement of the tourists - more marionette than human - dressed as alpine peasants, the photos exhibit the perfect fabrication of a notion of identity. The extraneous nature of the photo session is only reinforced by the disjunction of image and sound in the film. While the process of identification seems to come across as no more than a light hearted and inquisitive masquerade, the photographs reify the possibility that the notion of identity can be shaped simultaneously by both one's origin as well as one's current setting.

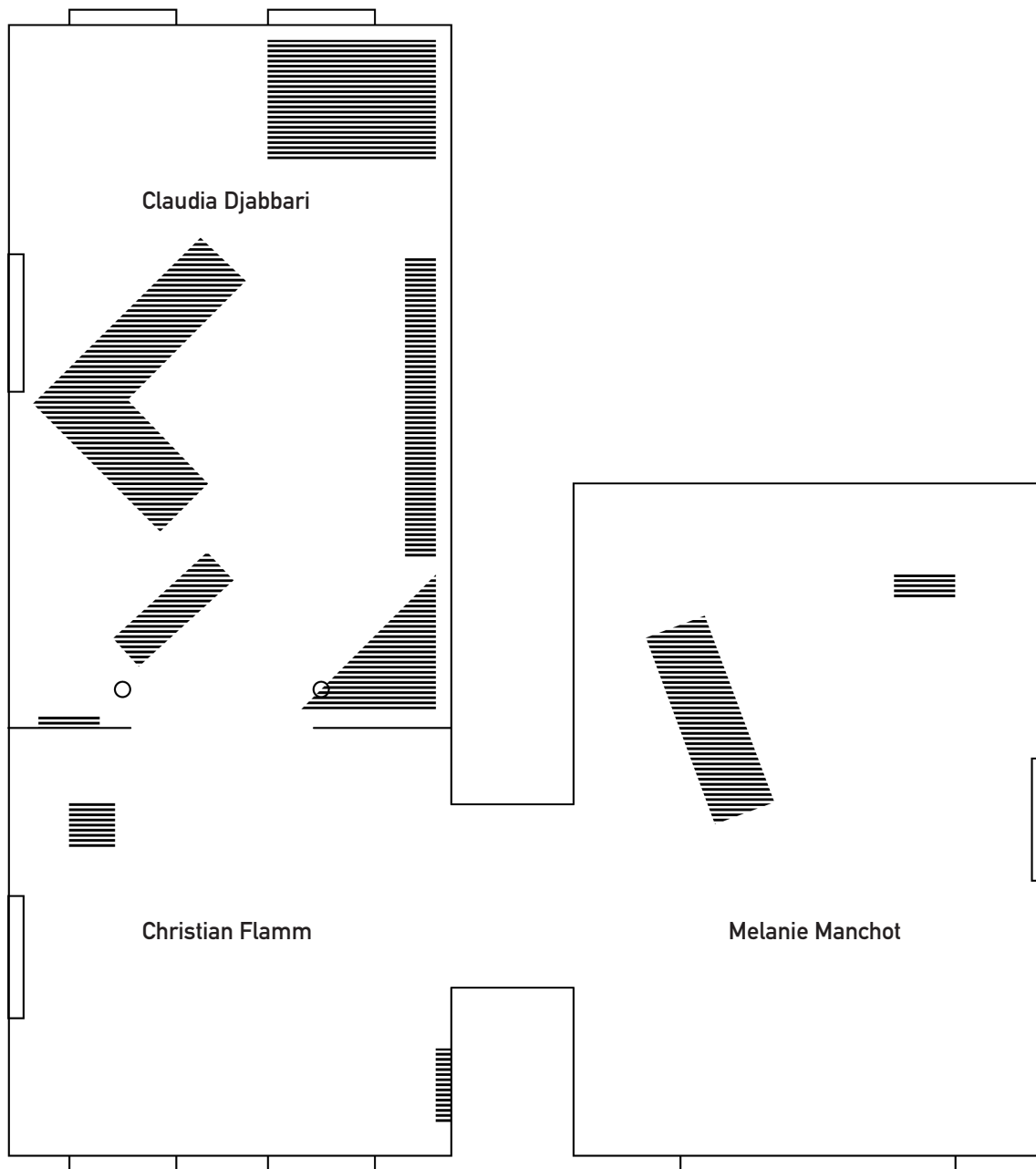
Christian Flamm's installation Quoted Out of Context (2011) seizes this idea of incorporating a symbolic visual language while continually trying to disassociate from it. The postcards feature images of previous drawings in which Flamm uses pictorial codes from art, film, music, literature, and advertising, that form part of a common cultural knowledge and social memory. As a means of exploring the varying associations between meanings that stem from the images themselves and from the assumptions that are brought to them, Flamm juxtaposes the already ambivalent images with the solid black surfaces that surround them in the postcard rack. The alienation of the images from their representative connotations is further exemplified by their sculptural mode of display, which prevents the postcards from being interpreted as a souvenir. The embroidered canvas concludes the negation of any form of representationalism and dissolves the meaning into abstraction.

In the same way Claudia Djabbari's installation defies an easy interpretation. Its elements, a series of small casted Volkswagen buses or the matted jacket adorned with stickers from the 'anti-nuclear movement', for example, are not representative, but suggestive of a version of the genuine article. Rather than being a prototype or imitation of a protest jacket or a set of furnishings, these models hold onto their element of abstraction in order not to be clearly identified with their sources of influence. The overall installation insinuates a storage space, in which those items find a place that might no longer be directly relevant but yet carry a personal or otherwise meaningful value. Their significance is relative to the peculiarities of processes of identification.

The formational process of the concept of identity as an installation, a temporal construction, is also reflected in the formats of presentation that the artists chose for their respective works. Taking into account that there is no neutral ground for a positioning of identities, most of the works retain as much physical flexibility as possible within the biased space of the German Embassy. With this spatial gesture the artist accept the invitation to exhibit in the embassy's premises with some hesitation, not to say with some resistance.

In regards to the initial question of how art can position itself in such a manner as to avoid reaffirming the representative idiosyncrasies of a conflicted space such as the German Embassy, the exhibition provides an opportunity to consider this question in a critical way. The curatorial framework is concerned with the relationship between the dominant assumptions that the space embodies and the contemporary artistic engagement with it, which has long eschewed a contextualisation in specific national or cultural terms. Therefore the exhibition invites the viewer to give into a compositional structure of identity that oscillates between content and context and offers a calculation of both its internal and external apperceptions, a process of translation of the assumed characteristics into a format that allows the viewer to critically engage with it.

FLOOR PLAN



Melanie Manchot
Perfect Mountain, 2011
HD video, stereo sound, 15'50 minutes
40 photographs, 14.5x21cm each, display table: metal, wood, glass

Christian Flamm
Quoted Out of Context, 2011, mixed media, 64x166x64cm. Do not touch
Untitled, 2011, embroidery, 96.5x137.2cm

Claudia Djabbari
In Storage, 2011
size variable, mixed media installation
Volkswagen, 2011, mixed media, 195x33x130cm
Protestpulli, 2011, wool, stickers, canvas, 50x60x3cm

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Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
London