

HEIDI WOOD

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La Maison de banlieue (The House in the Suburbs)

Espace d'art contemporain Camille Lambert, Juvisy-sur-Orge

Heidi Wood is an artist who was born in London in 1967 and lives in Paris. She is currently exhibiting her work at the Espace d'art contemporain Camille Lambert in Juvisy. Her *Serving Suggestions* are literally paintings combined with suggested accompaniments. In other words, Heidi Wood does not stop at the paintings. She suggests decorative arrangements that integrate them. Her work must thus be seen on two levels: both as painted canvases that function most often in diptychs or triptychs, and as suggested environments, sometimes on the wall, spreading over the corner of a room, or even onto the floor.

Each part of a polyptych can be described as a generally non-figurative motif on a colored background. These motifs, thus isolated, function as signs that, when brought together evoke a means of signaling, or a new type of language that is not altogether unfamiliar. These perfectly elementary motifs remind us of the many pictograms that inform our urban and mercantile environment. Furthermore, the smooth aspect of the planes of color, the contrasted contours, the precisely stabilized play on forms and counter forms, the finely-tuned proportions between positives and negatives sets up an immediate kinship with these systems of codes, reputed for their readability, such as road signs, or signs in department stores.

These short series of juxtaposed motifs thus form strange puzzles with uncertain and laconic meanings. This is no doubt the reason Heidi Wood gives each of her works a subtitle in the systematic form of an expression in English: a proverb supposed to be univocal, that expresses common sense in a few words but is often more complex than is widely believed.

The suggested decorative environment has significantly evolved since the exhibition at galerie éof in Paris in 2001. In displays like those in furniture stores (mostly carpeted and furnished in a seventies revival manner) where her paintings were perfectly at home in an ironic relation of mutual promotion, Heidi Wood's environments have become more streamlined, more essential. The second change in her work is what she described as a "spillover" of the motif onto the wall. The vertical support to the paintings is treated in a similar manner to the paintings themselves, i.e. covered in a motif formally reminiscent of, without reproducing exactly one of the motifs in the polyptych. This contamination of the motif into its surrounds sometimes reaches the floor, which is covered in a form cut out of either carpet or linoleum.

Thus the five "installations of paintings" Heidi Wood has created for the Espace d'art contemporain Camille Lambert transform the space so completely that they seem to be a coherent whole. In each room the cleverly calculated plastic and esthetic relations are like those inside the polyptychs. The unity of the whole was even conceived as a housing unit, as evidenced by the choice of *La Maison de banlieue (The House in the Suburbs)* as title.

Spectators visiting this "display home" primarily witness the artist's exploration over many years of the relation of painting with its domestic and decorative environment. They will realize the minute they walk in the door that they are in fact penetrating the painting, are wandering in the heart of a confusing game, even though it is "disillusionist" (Heidi Wood's paintings are the contrary to trompe-l'œil); a system of coordinated relations of colors, textures, lines, forms and motifs. They may enjoy imagining how the painting / architecture dialectic is still worthy today of being considered more carefully by those who design the settings of our daily lives.

The parallelepipedic space of the art center is thus transfigured in an approach that it would be instructive to place in the historical perspective of painted decor; that it would be useful to confront with those of the Vatican stanze, interior design of the 16th century in France, Sol Lewit's drawing rooms or Theo van Doesburg's audacious projects that attempted to inverse the conventional subordination of painting to architecture.

In other words, Heidi Wood's five suggestions come together in a pertinent and malicious resumé of the many advantages to be found in thinking of space in the same way as in a painting.

Philippe Coubetergues, 2002

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Translated from French