

HEIDI WOOD

Heidi Wood, *Date limite de consommation (Use-by Date)*

Galerie Anne Barrault

October 18 – December 20 2008

In the Heidi Wood case, the suspect is the painting.

The fact is that there is something suspicious today about abstract painting. Form, background, color, line, format and its frontal nature. We have come to the end of the road. These days, any new variation is no more than a quote. It already belongs in the public domain. Geometric abstraction has indeed become a universal language. Everyone reads it as a sign. Everyone recognizes its potential power as a logo, its ability to encapsulate a message and give the impression of a cryptic announcement. In an unexpected twist, abstract painting refers back to the very domains that appropriated it for the purpose of signage and, more generally, communication.

On the scale of the painting unit, Heidi Wood's work already strives to describe this phenomenon by playing with the shifting meanings of the motif painted on a monochrome background. The obviously spare composition, its extreme simplicity, its uncluttered readability give it an air of déjà-vu that immediately introduces a sense of doubt or suspicion about the real status of the object that we are unable to situate precisely between abstract painting and road sign. During this initial phase of work, she sets the tone. Make no mistake, appearances work against the artwork here, utterly against it. The means of presentation adopted confirm the painting in its role as suspect. They deliberately resemble promotion strategies, reinforcing a sense of corruption. We must thus recognize them on a second level as simulations of an ideal, efficient serving suggestions and appealing presentation styles.

For her third exhibition with Anne Barrault, the artist, faithful to her mimetic approach, is putting on a sort of evolving showroom, like that of a small business wishing to familiarize its clientele with a wide range of services. From this perspective and in a subtle game of recycling and self-quotation, she associates completely new formulae with works appreciated in the past and updated here for the occasion. The demands of the public, always on the lookout for something new, will be more than satisfied by a weekly turnover throughout the exhibition. Between tradition and innovation (alias Heidi Wood's fiction), the art polishes its brand image.

And the image as a promise of an ideal is indeed Heidi Wood's stock and trade. The motif set in a given environment becomes image. The context generates and justifies the motif and vice versa. The artwork reveals itself in this occasional and specific interdependence. This is precisely what fascinates the artist, who has no illusions about the autonomy of the painting and even less about its timelessness. From now on, she will grant it a life expectancy of five years (when it reaches its use-by date, each painting will be destroyed unless it is spared through acquisition). Henceforth, all the material aspects of the artwork will be only simulations. And it is only in these terms that Heidi Wood plays with marketing strategies for them.

Philippe Coubetergues

September 2008

Translated from French