

Humor

German



2310 Pasadena Avenue Ste. 211 | Los Angeles, California 90031 | contact: @fivechurches
Opening | September 19th 6–9pm | performances at 7 and 8 pm | open Sat–Sun until October 12th 1–5pm

PEPPERMINT WITH ALL THE PEPPERMINT GONE

December 20, 2023

Dear Mirjam and Christopher,
Dear Antonia,

Hello. I received your e-mail, and am sorry that you were looking for a quick response that I couldn't deliver as I was traveling. I appreciate that you have read my writing or seen exhibitions I have made with artists. I don't want to discourage Christopher and Mirjam from the ideas they have put together, in cooperation with the editorial team, but these ideas are not for me. I guess I think art theory, and discourse, are among those "hegemonic constructions," and I find art discourse extremely ill-suited to carry the extreme left politicization that it is being asked to bear (actually often catalyzed by the right and enacted by the left in defense). The fact that the left just keeps ramping up political language and claims for its symbolic uses of language and symbolic theory production that is fully distanced from the sites of struggle that matter is part of the problem. People are pretending and, in fact, the relationship of theory or scholarly knowledge to politics hasn't changed since the 1980s. The claims and rhetoric just get hotter, the list of terms changes and gets augmented: "politics of feminism, queer, and critical race theory, and, more recently, to crip theory and disability studies." It feels like a surface politics, driven by desired outcomes which don't get to the roots of the problem [though I don't agree with publishing this in Artforum, this dialogue gets at what I am bringing up: Let's Ride Art History After Black Studies, Copeland, Aranke, Gleisser]. My description leaves out a whole economic story or marketization of ideas and the university and museum, which goes hand in hand. Why anchor with Lippard and Krauss? Why canonize Jamison, Leung, Rowland? I am not even getting into the racializations [...]. In 2018-19 I started sending decline letters to journals and magazines who do not have integrated editorial groups or advisory boards.

I say even this much – incomplete, selected examples – so you understand why I can't easily take on such an invitation. I respect Christopher's and Mirjam's work and I don't want to disagree with people who I know have a sharp interest in revitalizing a discussion of how culture, art discourses and texts are politically constituted, and who I know wish to challenge established languages and histories and ways of doing things. I guess I just don't believe that more writing within the same discourses and traditions is the way to go forward. I like what you are saying about sculpture's potential (in the wake of conceptualism, and making the break and jump that Moten, Copeland and others make, to say also, sculpture in the wake of black studies), but I fall on another side. That is, on the side of what it does in my experience, and in the everyday, and on the side of what is beneath reason, the embodied (without accepting a mind/body split), the nonverbal [...] and not what we might say about what it does. I could share artists whose work I have had experiences with which help me give rise to the things I may think, but I would be just supplying names in some imaginary argument with your names, your chosen practices rooted in your experiences, your reading and educational formations, your sense of how you occupy your life and bodies, etc.

This is not a complete response, but I hope it suffices to respectfully share why I am declining.

Yours, Élisabeth VR

RR, DL, SL, AC, SF, RA, TT, NJ, WK, HS