

Ralf Peters

Flying Balances

Opening Thursday 19th April 2018, 6-8 p.m.
Exhibition 20th April – 2nd June 2018

The eye can never get enough of the images in the Yangmei (Chinese Balls) series. Many fruits of the strawberry tree gleam intensely red and enticingly among shiny leaves, yet appear to resist the gaze. The twigs, from which the leaves and fruit hang suspended, vanish into a mysterious white light that floods the pictorial space. The fruit appear to “fly” in a dazzling void way beyond reach – much like a promise that one doubts will ever be fulfilled.

Ralf Peters baits us with beauty: “I would mostly like to draw the viewer in,” the conceptual photo artist has noted. But there is always something irritating about the kind of beauty employed here. Specifically, in Yangmei (Chinese Balls) it is the gulf between the sensual quality of the fruit and the intangible space surrounding them. The weightlessness of the fruit flying in various stages of ripeness among the leaves creates a strong impression of weightlessness. There is little of the digital post-processing here that Peters frequently applies in his other series. Here, the effect of floating or flying is created by an extreme focus on the fruit that causes the mesh of twigs and branches in the background to dissolve and vanish almost completely.

Where the viewer stands is unclear. The fruit on offer in these images is enticing. Their ambivalence, however, does not encourage reaching for one. If the large amount of white in these photographs imbues them with great lightness and brightness, it also makes them appear abstract. Moreover, despite their floral theme, the effect of these images is one of great artificiality.

Flying Balances, the exhibition title, neatly summarises the artist’s play on beauty and artificialness, on baiting and enticement. This play on dualities infuses his entire oeuvre. Regardless of the source of his themes – nature, architecture, portraits – Peters is invariably concerned with the fragile “flying balance” between immaculate surface and unsettling detail.

Frequently emulating the Romantic artists, who composed idealised landscapes, Peters not only creates surprisingly convincing fake scenarios but also presents situations in which everything is more “real” than it looks. In his Mix series, for example, he used identical pictorial elements to re-compose several hotel pools of the kind we know from tourist brochures. The Salta series, by contrast, shows different views of an airport through a window: monotonous bands of green lawn and grey asphalt produce the effect of a photographic version of colour-field painting – nothing has been manipulated, however. For his acclaimed Tankstellen (Petrol Stations) series, reminiscent of Edward Hopper, Peters photographed the brightly lit locations by night, and airbrushed out any logos and signs, to make them appear like UFOs in black space.

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Ralf Peters

Flying Balances

Opening Thursday 1st February 2018, 6-8 p.m.
Exhibition 2nd February – 14th April 2018

Such references to art history and reflections on art theory play a considerable part in Peters' work, which is not surprising since he originally started out as a painter. Born in northern Germany in 1960, Peters studied with Jörg Immendorff, the German painter and art professor, and in 1998 began to work as a conceptual photographer.

Peters' works have been on display at leading art galleries and museums in Zürich, Tokyo and Triest; Munich, Mexico City, Miami, Frankfurt and Berlin.

In the current exhibition, Peters presents Yangmei (Chinese Balls) as well as several extremely wide landscapes. Here he has filled the sky with vast numbers of balloons (Balloons), hanggliders (Glider), or paragliders (Paraglider), creating grotesquely teeming skylscapes that transform these landscapes into playparks. Alongside this rather playful aspect in Peters' work, there is also a philosophical dimension, especially in the way he treats empty space. For his Skylines series he photographed merry-go-rounds and city streets, waves and mountain ridges. Rendered in an extremely tall portrait format, the actual subject occupies no more than the bottom third of the image. These works inexorably direct the gaze into nothingness, be that the black void of night, or the whiteout of nowhere by day. The viewer can also enter into this endless, reflective space in Yangmei (Chinese Balls).

Alice Henkes