

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Spieltrieb: Polly Apfelbaum, Beverly Fishman, Ryan Mrozowski, Kathleen Ryan
by David Rhodes, February 7th, 2018



Installation view of Spieltrieb.

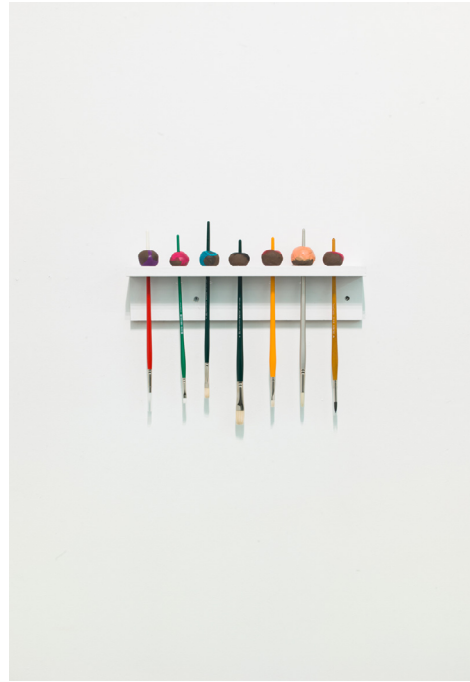
German polymath Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) coined the term *Spieltrieb* in response to Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) text *The Critique of Judgment*. Kant's own *Sinnestrieb* (sensuous drive) and *Stofftrieb* (form drive) are synthesized by Schiller as *Spieltrieb* (play drive) thus rejecting the duality inherent in Kant's idea. More recently, Jacques Rancière, possibly the most significant writer on aesthetics since Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) has returned to Schiller's dialectical innovation by renouncing what he sees as the false polarity of art and life. If there is any doubt about the continued influence and vitality of Schiller's notion of *Spieltrieb*, then it can be added that Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) the social theorist, said that Schiller's aim was no less than to create a new reality principle within a function of aesthetics.

In this exhibition, the idea of an art object intended for disinterested contemplation is, as might be expected given the exhibition's title, undermined during a switchback journey through a group of works that thoroughly invest in real world experience as much as white cube rumination. Typically, the works deploy reference or process as a connection or even continuation of non-art experience. Imagine a 1960s Happening, only without the physical participation, instead visual pleasure and intellectual engagement overlapping—derived from aesthetic objects—*Spieltrieb* in other words. Beverly Fishman's urethane on wood paintings, and vinyl and paper on board works, are formal abstractions inspired by the commercial shaping and packaging of pharmaceutical products such as Prozac or Xanax. Take, for example, *Untitled (double pain)*, (2017) where two conjoined identical shapes have an incrementally shaped physical depth, like a tablet, and have different, sharply contrasting color combinations that could in another context—a pharmacy or hospital—identify different uses. The representation of emotional and physical pain relief becomes an invitation to something altogether different—brightly colored minimalist constructions—both analogy and critique in a powerful hit of spiked formalism. Kathleen Ryan's sculpture *Silk Tie Back* (2018) sprawls as if thrown, dropped, or discarded across the floor. It comprises heavy materials, including powder coated steel chain and bowling balls that mess with scale and expectation. What are we looking at? Its size and functionality are ambiguous and confound in a play of industrial, machine—tooled, decorative whimsy.

JACK HANLEY GALLERY



Ryan Mrozowski, *Untitled*, 2018, Acrylic on linen, 18 × 13 inches.



Polly Apfelbaum, *Deep Brown Notes*, 2017, Ceramics, Dimensions variable.

The small paintings of Ryan Mrozowski are puzzles, all *Untitled* (2018) and acrylic on linen. On the one hand they are like a trompe l'oeil renderings of folded cloth—they are in fact based on photographs of folded cloth—however, on the other, and on approaching them, they are clearly segments pieced together like a jigsaw: Sculptural, certainly, but also thoroughly illusionistic. A nod toward synesthesia, via reference to the 19th Century American seven note notation system is found in Polly Apfelbaum's two-part work *Deep Brown Notes* (2017). Shapes and colors are designed to recall notes. Suspended terracotta shapes are colored with textile spray at the center of a gallery room at around eye-level and a wall mounted row of paint brushes with terracotta beads further enhance the point of sound, shape, color, interchange. Playfulness, playing, and play inform shape and concept as much more than mutually dependant.

Play and gaming are by now familiar tropes in art making of various types. Artists have long referred to the importance of play as a strategic or ontological and crucial aspect of making. What is different in this exhibition is the potential to make these factors a substantial part of how the works are experientially as well as interpretively encountered. They can become how it is to be in the world, rather than simply reporting it—something like reading a John Ashbery poem and discovering that the form of the poem is also the form of thinking, and also the process of writing the poem too.

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