

BASEL

Michelle Grabner

ANNE MOSSERI-MARLIO GALERIE

Michelle Grabner's multiple roles—as artist, professor, curator, and critic—enable her to approach her artistic practice in a variety of ways. This highly concentrated exhibition included thirteen paintings and two sculptures, all dated 2017 and untitled. Presented as a hanging installation along one wall were eight small-format pictures whose gridded patterns called to mind tea towels or place mats, and were redolent of everyday routines linked to meals and cleaning. Domesticity constituted the frame of reference for these works, as it has for many of Grabner's earlier pieces. She paints her colorful gingham designs on burlap, a fibrous, hard-wearing, and somewhat recalcitrant material that has associations with everyday use in such things as carpets, bags, and (presumably) environmentally friendly packaging. After first mounting the fabric on a panel and priming it with a monochrome undercoat, the artist then uses a ruler to draw a grid across the picture plane, which she fills in with white gesso markings and dashes of paint.

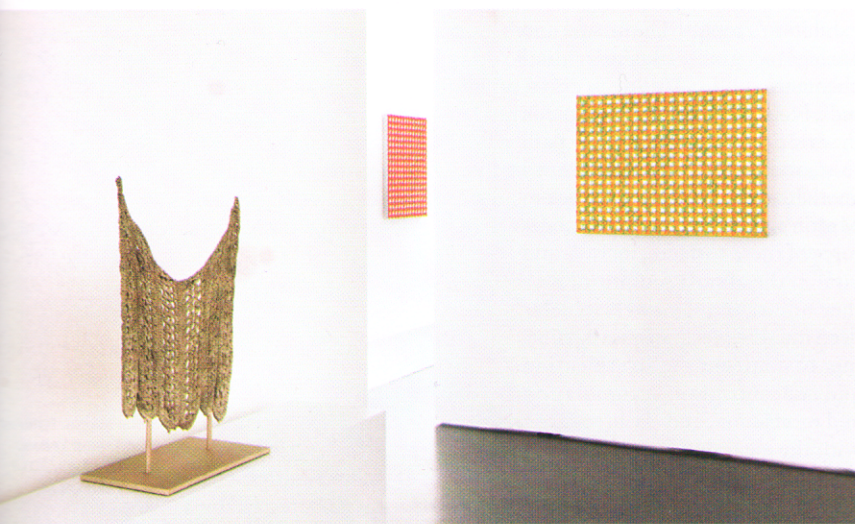
In so doing, Grabner straightens the textile patterns and turns the cloths into planes subdivided into grids. This move goes against our everyday experience, in which tablecloths are always threatening to fall off the edges of tables and in which towels sometimes hang in shapeless masses or lie scrunched up in corners. In a process of transformation, the artist lends her two-dimensional compositions a depth that is both optical and painterly. The colored priming of the burlap causes the checks to shimmer, and the paint's hues cause the grids to dance, making them flexible: The works are imbued with a sense of animation that calls to mind the artist's own physical and mental activity. Her process is a repetitive practice, carried out as if it were a daily chore. At the same time, however, the paintings themselves also stand for interruption of routine: When Grabner cocurated the 2014 Whitney Biennial, she wrote in its catalogue that inherent to the “instability of repetition” is the possibility of “illustrating difference.” Here, the straightened-out and strictly drawn grid patterns give rise to a new form of tangibility.

weave function as a sieve thorough which she extrudes paint onto the surface, creating abstract patterns. Here each of the cast-bronze blankets was set on two thin legs, fixed, in turn, to a plinth that was also bronze; they cast their pattern into the space around them in changing ways, depending on the fall of the light. The blankets were presented as if they seemingly stood upright, in defiance of gravity, as if they had been frozen in the middle of some significant ritual gesture. They were cut off forever from the familiar space of the body, which they once warmed and enveloped; in meeting these fates, they became neither sinister nor ghostly, but rather acquired the strangeness and fascination of a liturgical act in someone else's faith.

—Maja Naef

Translated from German by Nathaniel McBride.

View of “Michelle Grabner,” 2017. Three untitled works, all 2017. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler.



The two monochromatic gold-brown bronze sculptures were cast from a material that similarly conveys a narrative of domestic production and use: knitted or crocheted blankets, which offer warmth and a sense of security, whether covering a baby or thrown over the feet of someone reading or watching television on the sofa. In other works, Grabner has employed these kinds of blankets as a painting tool: The gaps in their