

as their work developed. In some works Fijałkowski seems to be reaching for a zero point of pictorial action, as in *14.IX.61 Mandala*, 1961, a gray-green square bounded on all four sides by a red band, with a single, somewhat awkward gray line traced from its center to the bottom of the white field. This re-marking of the edges of the canvas is a recurrent gesture of Fijałkowski's; more than thirty years later, in *V Painting for Waleria*, 1992, he uses a blue line to mark off a white rectangle lit up by a red brushstroke at the bottom. It's as if the very act of positing a circumscribed area is what allows the emergence within it of some flicker of significant activity. Possibly this is a lesson learned during the years of communism: the importance of setting aside a zone of privacy, of separation, in which unstructured events can occur—a lesson perhaps harder to apply today when even our privacy has been colonized by commercial interests. Another red-bounded rectangle, this time framing a field traversed by two turquoise-blue horizontal bands, one around the middle and one at the bottom, was titled *No. VII During the Martial Law – 31.01.82*, 1982, clarifying the point of the effort to clear an autonomous space.

One of the more curious aspects of Fijałkowski's art is his interest, signaled by many titles, in the Jewish Talmud. (The artist is not Jewish.) While the earlier invocation of the mandala might suggest a meditative and experiential basis to his pictorial "theology," the Talmud is discursive in character and ethical in import. The crisscrossing bands of translucent color in *XXIV Talmudic Studies* and *Polish Talmud XIV*, both 1979—works in which the painter's revisions have not obscured his earlier sequences of marks—may be intended as equivalent to the Talmudic structure of commentary on previous strata of commentary. In any case, their shifting fields of atmospheric color admirably fulfill Fijałkowski's ambition to find "an open form that is undetermined and must be constructed through the process of reception."

—Barry Schwabsky

MUNICH

Gerry Bibby and Henrik Olesen

DEBORAH SCHAMONI

"Conversation in a Yes/No Landscape," curated by Nikola Dietrich, was the first collaboration between Gerry Bibby and Henrik Olesen (parts of the project were previously shown at Sismógrafo in Porto, Portugal). Yes and no, black and white: These were the classic binary oppositions articulated in the show's first room, titled "*Straße*" (Street), with its stark black-and-white paintings on carpets, variations on the motif of the asphalt street with its center line. Upstairs in a section titled "Versatile?" we saw a wooden easel with a transparent glass pane placed in front of a large window to reveal a view of the gallery's surroundings: Here the artists explored transparency, projection, framing, and imagination by way of an allusion to Magritte. The question mark in the title suggested that this versatility or openness was only ostensible, and a ball on the floor alluded to the possibility of a shatter-

ing (the glass pane, the window, the framework). A third room, containing the chapter "Language," was reached via a ramp boldly painted pink: Titled *Tongue* (all works 2016), it looked like one. Here stood a pair of black-and-white constructions made of painted wooden laths: a set of bars and an animal figure, with labels identifying them as *JAIL* and *ZEBRA*, respectively. Figure recognition, nomenclature, black on white: after the excursion into nature, the factual asserting itself once more. A work called *Power Line* also resembled a telegraph cable, raising the issue of communication as mediated by technology. On the floor were boxes of printed T-shirts. For twenty-five euros each, you could choose between slogans such as *YES/NO FUTURE*, *WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE*, *UN CAPTIF AMOUREUX*, and *WHAT IS EMPATHY?*—the nutshell conversations of a population that wears its messages on its chests. This room was artificially reduced in size by nearly half. The wall that was installed on wooden stands to achieve this bore the title *No Wall*; the pattern of the wooden laths on the back could be read as *NONONO*: perpetual refusal as a graphic pattern and static necessity. The press release (with checklist) was affixed to this surface, and behind it stood a bar table with stools, the terrace, a view of the greenery.

"Conversation in a Yes/No Landscape" consistently translated theoretical concepts into spatial arrangements; the approach is familiar from Olesen's previous work. Thus the asphalt pictures transformed the first room into a maze, giving the visitor no choice but to move in a zigzag. The hanging here was literally that, which is to say that three of the five pictures were suspended directly from the ceiling as room dividers. A certain opening-out took place with "Versatile?"; a conceptually motivated compression with "Language." In this way, the show was spatially organized around a central question: To what extent is decision-making still possible today, given the evident limitations of binary logic? And yet one does eventually have to choose, for or against, yes or no. The Latin root of the word *conversation* means "to twist" or "to turn": In other words, conversation means entering into ever new negotiations, repositioning oneself again and again. And so one of the printed T-shirts bore this message in German: *HORIZONTAL/VERTICAL; HEAT/NOISE; WINDOW/DOOR/BED; I/YOU/WE; A SKIRT IS NOT PANTS; GENDER IS A CONSTRUCTION*. This recourse to gender



View of "Gerry Bibby and Henrik Olesen" 2016. From *Costumes, 2016*. From *Costumes, 2016*. From *Costumes, 2016*. From *Costumes, 2016*.

construction (not exactly a new question) and the naive division man/woman accorded well with the show's in-your-face and at times self-consciously simplistic presentation, but, finally, thanks to the equal privileging of *and* and/or *or*, which the reader could intuitively fill in for the slash, it appeared in the end more ambiguous than one might at first have thought.

—Daniela Stöppel

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.