



263 views | Sep 12, 2018, 01:46pm

Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York



Clayton Press Contributor ⓘ
Arts

2'10" (two minutes, ten seconds)

Before uttering a word of his introductory remarks for the June 2018 opening of Charline von Heyl's *Snake Eyes* exhibition at the *Deichtorhallen* (Hamburg), John Corbett, the Chicago gallerist and music champion nonpareil, lifted his smartphone to the mic and played a 2'10" free jazz piece by the Norwegian trio *Moskus* (Musk Ox). The piece was *Fjesing* (Emoticon) from their album *Mestertyven* (Master Thief). Corbett's intent was to get the audience's attention and to just, simply, make them take the time to focus on what they were hearing, experiencing. It was a lesson in mindfulness, presentness. In his remarks, Corbett spoke about his relationship to poetry as well, saying, "I read poetry the way I listen to improvised music. It's not so important to interpret an improvisation as it is to experience it. . . at full scale. No abstract; no précis."

Petzel

Clayton Press, “Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.



Charline von Heyl, *Corrido*, 2018. © 2018 CHARLINE VON HEYL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

Linking the experience of engaging with von Heyl’s paintings to listening to this piece of music, Corbett added, “Charline’s paintings take time, too, but because they are paintings, people sometimes do walk past them, remark on their beauty, and move along.” But . . . and this is a huge caveat . . . von Heyl’s paintings defy conventional notions of beauty, the same way they flout traditional categorization. They are not, in her words, abstract paintings, nor are they figurative. Instead, they are “non-representational” paintings, which occupy an in-between space. To see von Heyl’s paintings always requires openness and total surrender. You have to look, move on, return and look again. This is a cycle of seeing the work on your own terms.

Petzel

Clayton Press, “Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

At her current solo exhibition at Petzel, the first of 17 paintings is in a small gallery opposite the reception counter. *Corrido* stands apart and alone—a monster painting measuring 108 x 90 inches. In a sense, it is both beginning and end of the exhibition since it contains so many of von Heyl’s personal, but often taken-for-granted, motifs and vignettes. If you give this work 2’10”, it is something of a Rosetta stone for the other 16 paintings. Stripes evolve into plaid; checker boards dissolve into liquid nothingness; and lyrical, leaf-like puzzle shapes, seemingly drawn from a Matisse-inspired French curve, harmonize everything. As Dirk Luckow wrote in his introduction to the *Deichtorhallen* exhibition catalog, von Heyl takes

“ ‘decorative forms,’ symbols and signs without direct references, to the extreme in her works. Her art focuses on improvisation, risk, discovery, as well as on special tricks, surprising twists, and feelings of elation—leaving the field of expression behind her. (*Snake Eyes*, p. 21)

Von Heyl is free and fearless. Like Asger Jorn or Luciano Fontana, two of her sources of creative inspiration, von Heyl confronts conventional ideas about aesthetics and beauty and embraces organized chaos and wild excessiveness, making work that is almost futuristic “Baroque.” And because von Heyl tries everything, and every painting—even simpler ones—is rich in detail, it is sometimes really difficult take in a whole work without devoting some time to it. So, the eyes and the mind settle on individual parts before seeing the whole. In a recent interview, von Heyl said, “That’s going to be confusing and even annoying because you cannot put it together in your own mind. You don’t recognize it, so you resist it and resent it.” (*Snake Eyes*, p. 60.) This is so true. Looking at von Heyl’s paintings is not like being blinded by the blurred, atmospheric beauty of a Gerhard Richter abstraction.

Petzel

Clayton Press, "Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York," *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.



Charline von Heyl, *La Vie est un Grand Lapin*, 2018. © 2018 CHARLINE VON HEYL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

Take these thoughts, and give yourself 45 minutes or an hour to experience von Heyl's 17 works as visual events.

When you move into the first gallery, there are three paintings. To the left is a predominantly red and black tondo, to the right is a painting with an embedded Mangold- or Serra-esque semi-circle, and dead ahead is another large work, titled *Vandals without Sandals*. Each painting warrants at least 2'10". *Vandals without Sandals* is so annoyingly and wonderfully complex, you need a bench to sit and absorb it: maybe it is the copper ground, maybe it is sampling from modern art history, maybe it is the penciled

Petzel

Clayton Press, “Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

German script—*Gelbe Hose, Blauer Frack* (Yellow Pants, Blue Jacket.)

This refers to Goethe's broken-hearted character Werther, who wore such an outfit when he committed suicide.



Charline von Heyl, *Poetry Machine #3*, 2018. © 2018 CHARLINE VON HEYL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

A poetic spirit washes over the second gallery. Three paintings, serially titled *Poetry Machine #1*, *#2* and *#3*, depict the profile of a woman's head atop an anvil-like shape. The “portrait” suggests Emily Dickinson, looking forward, laser-beamed, with her hair parted and pulled back tight. What better way to produce a poem than to forge it? Or as Paul Valéry wrote, “A

Petzel

Clayton Press, “Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

poem is really a kind of machine for producing the poetic state of mind by means of words.” But there are three other paintings in the gallery. *Dial P for Painting* is a rendering of an antique rotary phone with a fleshy cloud hovering above it. Perhaps this title is a riff on the title of Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Dial M for Murder*, with von Heyl commenting on how painting cannot be “killed,” even though Paul Delaroche first declared “painting is dead” in 1839. *5 Signs of Disturbance* may refer to a short, albeit plotless, story by Lydia Davis wherein an eccentric protagonist is easily entranced by inanimate objects. And finally there is *Floodsubject*, the poet’s personal metaphor for immortality. Dickinson wrote Thomas Higginson, one of her several correspondents:

“ You mention Immortality.

That is the Flood subject. I was told that the Bank was the safest place for a Finless mind. I explore but little since my mute Confederate, yet the “infinite Beauty” – of which you speak comes too near to seek.

The escape enchantment, one must always flee.

Paradise is of the option.

Letter 319 from Emily Dickinson to Thomas Higginson, June 9, 1866

The last and largest gallery is a treasury of seven works. It is also the trickiest gallery, testing a gallery goer’s attention. The diversity seems enormous, and von Heyl’s humor is most obvious. Any literary clues—real or imagined—are more difficult to mine and would be more conjectural. By now, you can be comfortably uncomfortable with just looking.

Petzel

Clayton Press, "Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York," *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

Thinking again about *Corrido*, as well as the other works, you can see how independent parts are integrated into wholes and how von Heyl's motifs and vignettes resurface. Von Heyl confesses that she is a "visual junkie . . . always looking for the next fix, and the dose has to be higher and higher." (*Oranges and Sardines, conversations on abstract painting*, p. 87.)

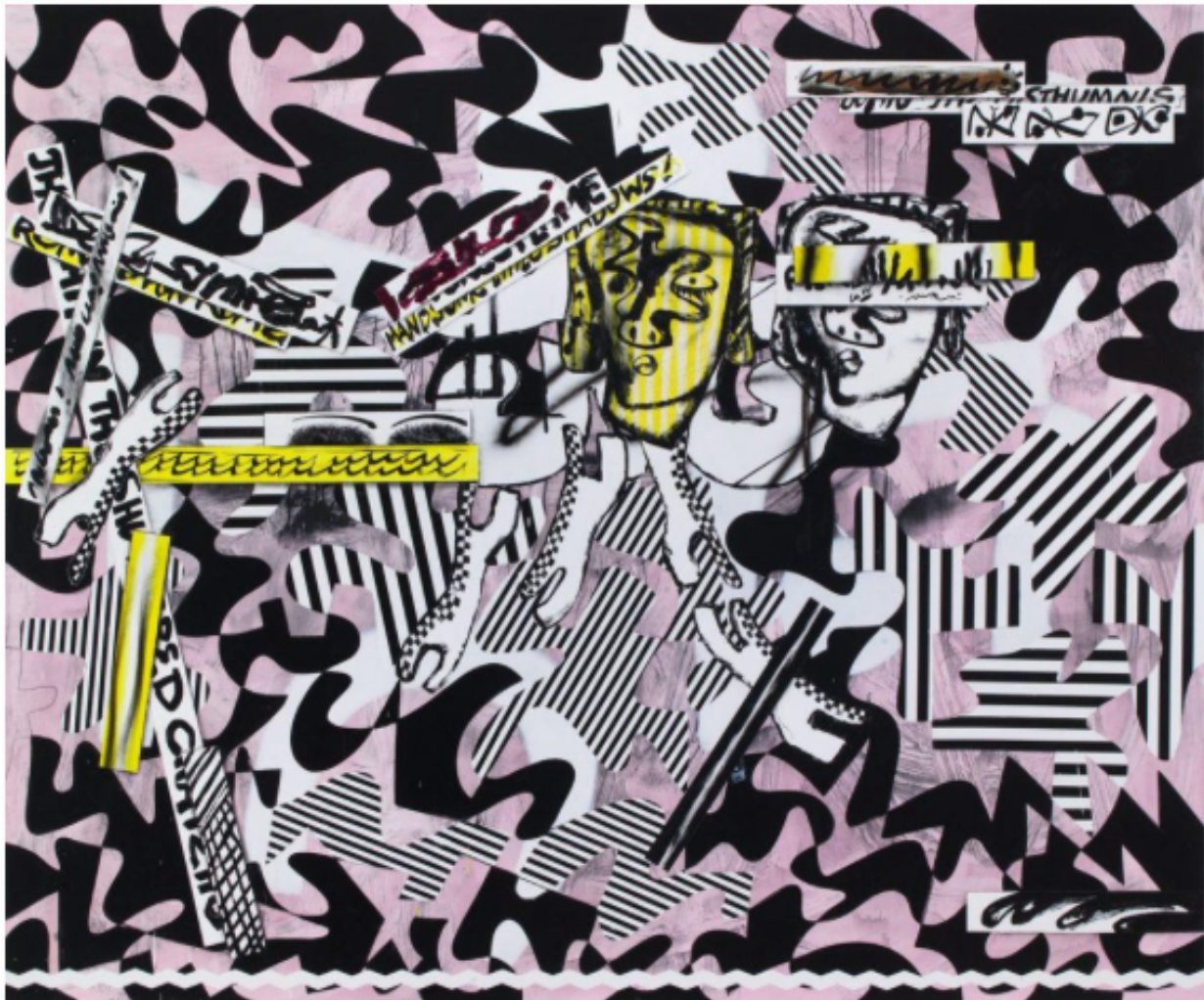
Mana Hatta, an unusual painting, since it was made on raw linen, combines acrylic oil and charcoal. In some places, von Heyl pushes the paint through the linen back to front, building texture and adding depth. Its neighbor, *Dub*, shares its visual DNA with a 2008 painting, titled *P*, on view at the *Deichtorhallen* survey. *La Vache Qui Rit* (The Laughing Cow), contains a drooping udder tattooed with a Swiss cross; *Hero Picnic* could be titled *Dubuffet with bottle and bowling pin*. *Lady Moth* is as obviously musical as any painting in this exhibition might be, with a ground of charcoal musical staves on which a Lady Moth is super imposed. *Do You Peeve Cato?* peeves the viewer precisely because, "You don't recognize it, so you resist it and resent it." It succeeds because it is entirely unrecognizable as "a thing."

Finally, alone on the gallery's south wall is *The Language of the Underworld*. It is another big, bold painting, harkening back to *Corrido*'s stripes, dissolving checkerboards, and leaf-like puzzle pieces. Since titles jump out to von Heyl, from sources as diverse as crime novels to poetry, this title could well be from David Mauer's 1981 text about specialized vocabularies in American subcultures. Despite its title, the painting is another plotless visual story. It underscores von Heyl's fascination with language, even a preverbal one, conveyed through greeking text and partially obscured words. In the *Snake Eyes* catalog, von Heyl explains that through her mother she came to understand that language is "not just literal, but is alive and full of agency." (p. 62.) Von Heyl is "just trying to keep the paintings ahead of language. Or better yet, ahead of sentences. . . I just want to get the viewer to move past definitions and on to something more personal

Petzel

Clayton Press, “Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

and fragile, a place where thoughts and feelings meet, where looking feels like thinking.” (*Snake Eyes*, p. 61.) But for all the talk of improvisation and poetry, music and language, parts and wholes, von Heyl’s paintings are just what they are: complexed, constructed, intentional works of art.



Charline von Heyl, *The Language of the Underworld*, 2017. © 2018 CHARLINE VON HEYL. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

Remember all it takes is 2’10” per painting, time enough, in von Heyl’s words, “to leave a hole in the mind, a longing.” “The moment of looking is the most stretched moment possible—the aftertaste of the moment before and a future in which you want to go back to see what you have just seen.”

Petzel

Clayton Press, "Charline von Heyl, New Work At Petzel Gallery, New York," *Forbes*, September 12, 2018.

(*Oranges and Sardines, conversations on abstract painting*, p. 87.) This prolonged looking becomes a place where thoughts and feelings meet. Von Heyl has few peers in her generation of artists.

Charline von Heyl, New Work, Petzel Gallery, New York through October 20, 2018.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/claytonpress/2018/09/12/charline-von-hey-l-new-work-at-petzel-gallery-new-york>