

ARTFORUM

Artforum.com Critic's Picks October 2007

Peter Schuyff

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY 526 West 26th Street, Room
213 September 7–October 13

Peter Schuyff is more than a contemporary surrealist—the psychological discomfiture that ensues when he shamelessly superimposes his now-archetypal abstract ideograms over a distinct visual field or genre-painting image is only a humorous subtext. His practice—comprising preposterous visual juxtapositions—is grounded in critical strategies of interference. Perhaps out of favor in today's more sentimental cultural milieu, poststructuralism and its deferral of meaning remain salient topics for many artists. Still, an analysis of Schuyff's work in terms of surrealism is not erroneous. Addressing the works' playful, charming, and strange qualities speaks to the heart of the artist's engagement with fact and fantasy, volume and flatness, abstraction and representation. Yet this new body of work is so much more than a simple rehearsal of the visual pleasures of pop surrealism and attendant fundamental dualisms.



Lolipop, 2007, oil on found painting, 16 x 12".

Schuyff now lives again in Amsterdam, and this show is based on paintings and drawings that he found in Holland. Schuyff assaults the traditions of portraiture, landscape, nautical imagery, and a host of other genre pictures by positioning his puzzling, nonrepresentational trompe l'oeil patterns over the found paintings. The buttonlike objects that he renders with the illusion of real artifacts obscure the faces of his found portraits, such that the eyes of the sitters peer through the holes. Yet obvious references to masks or eyeglasses fail to account for the illogical visual languages at play. The incongruence between the found painting and Schuyff's abstract overlays obviates any dialogic exchange, casting the works as interventions in the politics of representation. *Clown*, 2007, one excellent example of Schuyff's witty style of bricolage, makes critical deconstruction as much fun to look at as it is useful to analysis.

—Michelle Grabner

The New York Times

Art in Review

September 28, 2007

By Roberta Smith

PETER SCHUYFF

Nicole Klagsbrun
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 13

Peter Schuyff was born in the Netherlands in 1958, raised in Canada and came to New York in the early 1980s and proceeded to become a hot young artist of the Neo-Geo persuasion. He was known for a spare but seductive fusion of Op Art and Surrealism, in which thinly brushed abstract patterns acquired a smoky, trompe l'oeil tint. The shallow, shadowy results restated geometric abstraction as hip, hallucinatory wallpaper, placing Mr. Schuyff squarely between his contemporaries Philip Taaffe and Kenny Scharf.

A couple of years ago Mr. Schuyff moved back to Amsterdam, where he has become well known as a member of the band Woodward. This show, his first in New York in five years, twists the high-low, art-craft, abstract-illusion dualities of his work into something more contradictory and repellent.

These new efforts, his best in some time, are small found paintings to which Mr. Schuyff has made judicious additions, in the tradition of the Situationist Asger Jorn. The found works are not amateur thrift shop pieces, but professional knockoffs — usually signed — that rifle through art history, evoking or simply copying works by Boucher, Van Gogh, Vermeer and other Dutch masters, the Impressionists and so on. There are also pulpy-looking portraits, including one of a dog.

Each painting has value added: a bit of Schuyffian artifice in faded primaries, including concentric circles, biomorphic grids, rows of doughnutlike circles. The additions seem molded or at least palpable. They might be refrigerator magnets, hooked rugs or the afternoon Play-Doh project of an exceptional kindergartner. The portraits get masks that turn them into aliens, superheroes or ethnographic subjects of a colonized nation.

Mr. Schuyff's efforts extend the appropriation-art strategies of the 1980s, and are nasty but memorable pieces of work. Even nastier are a large group of often quite respectable 18th- and 19th-century drawings by forgotten artists to which Mr. Schuyff has added black and white motifs reminiscent of those of Dutch De Stijl. The question of whether these drawings have been resurrected or vandalized is pertinent, and adds a final twist to this rich, confounding show.

Peter Schuyff

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY

In "Go easy around the eyes," an essay published in the booklet accompanying Peter Schuyff's recent exhibition at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery (his first there, and his first New York solo show in six years), Terry R. Myers situates the Dutch painter's oeuvre in a framework defined by post-endgame geometric abstraction on the one hand—he cites Mary Heilmann and Philip Taaffe as co-conspirators—and East Village "Neo-Surrealism" (another mini-movement of the late 1980s) on the other. Schuyff combines the two strands in his recent work by painting rings, grids, stylized clouds, and other shapes on found portrait, still-life, and landscape paintings and drawings. The resultant palimpsests are mordantly funny exercises in compelling the immovable object of conventional representation to meet the irresistible force of postmodern gamesmanship.

On the surface of his found canvases, which most often suggest the amateur (and often eccentric) renderings collected by Jim Shaw for his 1991 "Thrift Store Paintings" exhibition, Schuyff paints, in oils, a range of curious trompe l'oeil additions that obscure some parts of each image and emphasize or exaggerate others. Suggestive of not-quite-flat pieces of plastic or rubber laid out on the surface of the work (no attempt is made to integrate them into the composition more deeply), these unnameable interruptions are rendered in sometimes muted, sometimes brighter, but always slightly dirty-looking colors that jibe with, without actually matching, those of the pictures beneath. When applied to portraits in particular, Schuyff's additions have the simultaneously comic and disturbing effect of a Halloween mask, leaving enough of the face visible for us to be able to recognize it—if not by name, then by type—but making alien the overall impression it gives.

Anita (all works 2007) is typical: a small, undistinguished oil study of a woman in a deep red coat to which Schuyff has added a button-like gray-and-orange disk pierced by three round holes that frame the subject's eyes and grinning mouth. Once we are acclimatized to the incongruity of the disguise itself, our attention is drawn to isolated details like the woman's slightly decayed (or are they just badly painted?) teeth. But as Myers points out, such interventions are not purely mocking, either of unknown artists or their anonymous subjects; rather, they demonstrate a subtle empathy by highlighting the parallel absurdities of *both* artistic enterprises, reminding us of their equivalent unreality.



Peter Schuyff, *mute*, 2007, oil on found painting, 20 3/4 x 15 3/4".

When the ground is provided by a still life or landscape, the oddities of Schuyff's artificial additives are even more pronounced. In *storm*, for example, a gray-and-blue rectangle inset with five blue rings hovers in front of the cloudy sky above a rural scene like the ominous floating monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In *lams* and *little house in the country*, the artist has introduced stencil-like overlays to filter each idyllic base image into a cluster of partial views, pushing the already puzzle-like aspect of looking, and of attempting to understand what one is looking at, to a vertiginous extreme.

In Schuyff's works on paper, twenty-three of which were grouped together in the smaller of the gallery's two rooms, the artist restricts his palette to black and white and leaves aside the illusionistic lighting effects applied to his canvases. The results—perhaps because of the generally superior quality of the mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century drawings with which he begins, perhaps because of their too-tasteful achromatic scheme—are not quite as affecting as the paintings, but display the same sense of counterintuitive design. In *God2*, for example, a target blots out the head and shoulders of a robe-clad figure. In both bodies of work, however, Schuyff demonstrates a hard-won but lightly worn ability to impose his artistic will on others' work without appearing either cynical or, as was the case with Jake and Dinos Chapman's "improvements" to Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War*, superfluous.

—Michael Wilson

NEW YORK

Critics Pick, September 2007
nymag.com

By Jerry Saltz

In this show of paintings and drawings done over older paintings and drawings by other artists, Schuyff continues his give-and-take with history. He places strange geometric patterns, surreal biomorphic shapes, and other cartoony configurations over older art. In this way, Schuyff delves into the past and the future, good and bad taste, effrontery and admiration all at the same time. Schuyff has a great touch, a good sense of humor, and a way with color that make these little things go a long way.



Peter Schuyff, *lollipop*, 2007, Oil on found painting, 16 x 12 inches



Peter Schuyff, *nederland1*, 2007, Gouache on found drawing, 12.5 x 17.5 inches (image).



Peter Schuyff, *green girl*, 2007, Oil on found painting, 23 x 19.75 inches.



Best in Show

The Pagan Razor

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

by **R.C. Baker**

September 18th, 2007 11:33 AM

Peter Schuyff

This Dutch artist's simple device of painting button-shaped, trompe l'oeil frames over figures in thrift-store canvases yields some surprisingly sharp results. An able knockoff (signed QUAK) of a Boucher nude, belly-flopped onto a sofa, has been overlaid with a grid of grommet-like discs depicted so realistically that they read like a 3-D scrim. Often painted around the eyes of portraits (clowns, dogs, a copy of Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*), these circular shapes can feel as goofy as Elton John's specs or as sinister as a gas mask. Schuyff heightens the drama latent in Sunday painting, excavating that heartfelt desire to go beyond snapshots and create "art." In a different vein, the artist paints interlaced rectangles of black and white gouache over found landscape and life drawings, injecting bebop-ish verve into academic grayness. *Nicole Klagsbrun, 526 W 26th, 212-243-3335. Through October 13.*