

Magnus Andersen

Liste Art Fair

June 10-16. 2024

CATVERTISING by Pierre-Alexandre Mateos & Charles Teyssou

Magnus Andersen's *Capricho (nach Goya und Whiskas)* are a series of advertising paintings inspired by campaigns for the industrial cat food brand Whiskas. With a post-modern sensibility, they are domestic and shimmering, cute and opportunistic, tinged with ennui and slightly indolent. Organized in two general planes by a central axis from which the felines' heads emerge, his pop whims are subdivided into different optical and tactile boxes: a genre of bento painting, figurative, mediated and abstract, fueled by Photoshop.

Whiskas products, designed by food mogul Mars Inc (Twix, Skittles, Dove, M&M'S), are immediately recognizable by their bright purple color, which has become a Pantone shade over time. Like the red of Coca Cola or the Orange of Grindr, its visual imprint is powerfully anchored in our brains, calling on our dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and hypothalamus - areas of memory and value judgments. Its packaging, available in 109 countries, features ginger, black, bicolored or cinnamon cats with limited expressions. These images are the pinnacle of catvertising, appealing to consumers and onto which we can project our moods of the day: empathy, joy, pity or satisfaction. Aimed at consumers about whom the brand knows nothing, these clone-cats skillfully play on their poker face or the so-called Barnum effect, where the individual identifies and believes that information applicable to a wide audience applies only to himself.

Be Happy.

An icon of technical reproducibility, the Whiskas Army is globalized, haloed by its ubiquitous power but also blunted by its availability. For Magnus Andersen, herein lies precisely one of its semiotic qualities: the irresolution between notoriety and anonymity, happiness and depression, medicine and poison. Indeed, if the cat is the visual idiom most prized by agri-food groups, insurance and revolving credit companies, it's because it has a sedative and consoling function. In addition to their pharmaceutical virtues, felines help buy social peace by making modest households believe they are privileged. Herbert Marcuse would not have been mistaken: cats and their advertising subjugate the masses, extinguishing revolutions by making clumpy fat remains seem like the whims of spoiled children.

Cats know the difference.

Behind the scenes of his campaigns, every cat is a D list celebrity thirsty for fame and success. In this cruel world, there are the grand lords who dream of the Hotel Bristol and Jocelyn Wildenstein. On another one canvas, we think we recognize the feline version of Edie Sedgwick whose main qualities, Warhol said, were her irresistible cat-face and barbiturates. On a last one, a rebellious, grungy cat accused of transmitting toxoplasmosis from an Edinburgh squat to a ritzy house in Côte d'Azur.

Eight out of 10 cats prefer Whiskas.

The cats at the center of the paintings are used to sell off food stocks. This is the second subject of his paintings, and one of the commercial pillars of post-war hypermarket suppliers. After the endless shelves of Kellogg's and vanilla soda with their aggressive marketing, we stroll through aisles full of chicken- and tuna-flavored pâté, sweets, granules, cookies, cereals and hearty stew. These cat diets are in decline at a time of vegan options and organic menus that even their owners claim to enjoy.

Cat food follows the history of its consumers' fantasies and traumas: the anguish of lack, upward mobility, sentimental palliative, desire for children, health and nutritional care. Behind the bulimia of its endlessly reproduced commodities lies a state of hyperesthesia or sensory over-stimulation that deadens judgment. Late capitalism establishes the reign of equivalence, where all objects and subjects are tinged with a slight, introspective and indifferent spleen. With these repeated, numbered titles *Capricho N° (nach Goya und Whiskas)*, Andersen compares Whiskas's smiley and smelly porridge to Goya's dark, tormented engravings. Modernity here is depressive and relativist, and the creative act of both painter and advertiser is banal and anti-heroic.

Nestlé Realism: the ruin of modernity

In contrast to a fin-de-siècle Nestlé realism, in which Vermeer's milkmaid sells yoghurt pots and Nesquik powder is promoted by Quicky, a rabbit in a baggie and cap inspired by Aaron Carter of the Backstreet Boys, Magnus Andersen opposes zones of liquid architecture. After the utopia of consumerism, it is the ruins of modernity and virtual horizons that give shape to the third plane of Andersen's paintings. His points of escape lead to worlds of font-green or cell phones, where the surface of images is infinite, changing, interchangeable and impenetrable. In these fragmented zones, he explores the interplay of colors and shapes, layers, and depths, as a way out of a materialist, dying twentieth century. Each interval of the canvas has its own filter making it unique and heterogeneous to the other. What follows are pictorial and graphic collisions, a POMO hustle and bustle in which grid, camouflage, impressionist blur, gestural abstraction and emoji motifs respond to each other. The colors in these human-free zones are usually bright or even strident: Air Waves violines or Haribo grapes, blush pink or Windows meadow green. This colorimetry evokes childlike, artificial worlds, populated by LED screens and advertising jingles that Adblock can no longer filter out.

Mondo 2000

His paintings also find a genealogy in the global and World Wide Web aesthetics, where everything can be found everywhere, all the time. It's a Mondo 2000 canvas, named after the glossy Californian cyberpunk magazine from the early days of Silicon Valley, which mixed acid house, smart drugs, Japanese robotic futurism, globalized finance, and deviant cartoons. Magnus Andersen works on a pictorial history that has been put through Google Images' algorithmic washing machine, a Pinterest rollercoaster where the artist expresses his doubts and perplexity. Whiskas, Goya, pop art, abstract expressionism and 90s Cologne painting are all put on the same level. Everything here is tragic and decorative, like a Sunday afternoon spent scrolling on the iPad on a veranda. Tastes are flattened by time and a world cannibalized by instant images, where the only thing that counts is their shiny, fast-moving surfaces. His *Caprichos* Mars Incorporated are infused with an epic of capitalism: a manufactured dream burdened with the sweet scent of e-commerce and where every cat is a second-rate actor, a wannabe who is condemned to advertising figuration.