



TO WATCH

ANNA-SOPHIE BERGER

BY RYAN STEADMAN

People in the art world often grumble that art has “become the same as fashion.” By this they mean that art, traditionally seen as a series of “movements” that used to last ten, twenty, or thirty years, now moves at speeds similar to the seasonal changes we see in the fashion world. Ironically, very few artists have managed—or have even attempted—to make this loaded yet populist subject the focus of their work. Rebecca Horn has been touching on the interactive aspects of fashion since the late sixties, and more recently, Andrea Zittel and Josephine Meckseper have addressed fashion’s functional and commercial aspects, respectively, within their objects and installations. Enter the 24-year-old Vienna-based artist Anna-Sophie Berger. Berger is clearly inspired by the Bauhaus spirit of blurring the boundary between fine and applied arts, but also determined to cast a critical eye on the methods and archetypes of today’s international fashion mega-industry.

Coming from a family of Austrian jewelry producers, she was fascinated by the mechanics of style production and consumption from an early age. On graduating from high school, Berger was first drawn to fashion and photography before eventually turning to contemporary art, where her interests quickly led her to the wearable oddities of the German artist Franz Erhard Walther and then eventually to the historic work of the Bauhaus.

While Berger considers herself strictly an artist and not a designer, her artworks tend to closely mimic both the product and media that come out of the fashion world. “My work is self-reflective,”

she says. “It is as much a critique of the fashion industry as it is a reflection on human behavior, consumption, trends . . . all of which I consider inherent to society.” Her mock collections are as chic as they are humorous. They include items such as a colorful array of slippers emblazoned with their European sizes in giant numerals, as well as a bold set of scarves bearing head shots of Condoleezza Rice and Angela Merkel.

An earlier body of work called “mm2,” a grouping of rigidly geometric garments hung on the wall as artworks, garnered critical attention in a group show curated by the American artist Zak Kitnick in early 2013. These achromatic gridded designs, which echo the modernist forms of Frank Stella and Piet Mondrian, drape as beautifully on the wall as on a woman, as evinced by Berger’s photograph *The Gang* (2012), which documents a lineup of models wearing her creations.

For her exhibition at JTT gallery in New York last January, Berger dove head first into color, using it to further examine both the economic reification of choice as well as production’s arbitrary use of color for designation purposes. Numeric valuations were further brought to the fore, where things such as aspect ratios (standard sizes for banner ads and iPad screens) determined the final look of a new series of photographs that documented her new garments. Berger further upped the ante for this show by staging a performance during the opening, the only chance to see these garments in use.

Although Berger’s ultimate goal isn’t

to bring the fashion world and the art world together, she does recognize that they are both businesses with sophisticated means of addressing consumers. In this sense, she is part of the long lineage of transgressive Conceptual artists (such as Hans Haacke) who choose to undermine the establishment using its own language. “In the end, the pair of shoes is as much a sculpture as it is a pair of shoes, depending on its context,” Berger says. “What matters is the idea.”



Opposite page, from left:
Portrait by Sanna Helena
Berger.

Anna-Sophie Berger
Soft bristled (red)
2013

C-print, 4:3
25 x 33.3 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Above:
Anna-Sophie Berger
Slippers
2013

Various colors in calf leather
Size variable
Courtesy of the artist

Right:
Anna-Sophie Berger
Hard bristled (blue)
2013

C-print, 1:1
40 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist

