

ARTFORUM

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POINT IN MY LIFE
INTERNATIONAL

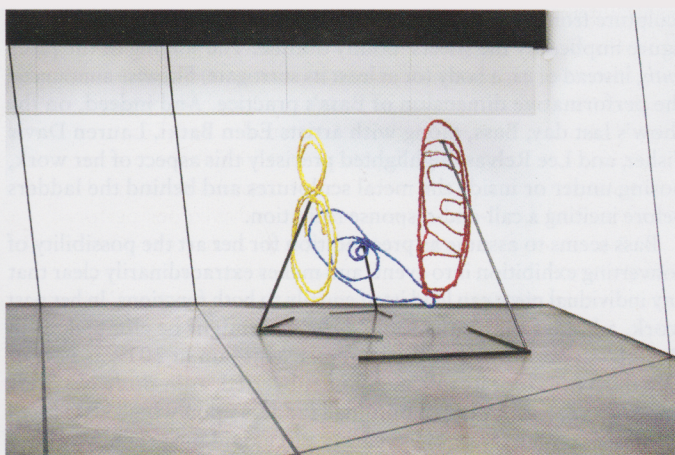
SAINT LOUIS

Lena Henke

WHITE FLAG PROJECTS

Each of the eight sculptures in “*Geburt und Familie*” (Birth and Family), Lena Henke’s recent show at White Flag Projects, is titled *Galocher*

View of “Lena Henke,”
2014. From left:
Galocher (poupée)
(Kissing with Tongues
[Doll]), 2014;
Galocher (oeil poché)
(Kissing with Tongues
[Black Eye]), 2014;
Galocher (fécond)
(Kissing with Tongues
[Fecundity]), 2014.



(French slang for a sloppy, openmouthed kiss). Indeed, the loose compositions of Henke’s works plant an irreverent French kiss on historic models of avant-garde production. The pieces are composed of fiber-glass rope that was dipped in boldly colored resin, laid on the studio floor in sketchy intertwining shapes, and left to dry. The resulting forms were then propped up on angular steel stands and adjusted to lean into or away from one another. The works’ two-part construction, wherein the base is an integral element of the sculpture, positions them within a long trajectory of sculptural assemblage, from the constructed sculpture of the 1940s to early Minimalism. Yet the primary colors and graphic, linear aesthetic of the loopy rope forms also call upon such diverse precedents as Surrealist automatic writing and Pop art. *Galocher (bécot)* (Kissing with Tongues [Kiss], all works 2014)—featuring a red form that seems to embrace a similar green one—pays oblique homage to Constantin Brancusi’s *Kiss*, 1907–1908, while other sculptures take up figures from popular culture: The primary-yellow *Galocher (poupée)* (Kissing with Tongues [Doll]) and *Galocher (coeur)* (Kissing with Tongues [Heart]) evoke characters from *Barbapapa*, a TV series the artist watched as a child. Although their points of reference range from art history to pop culture, the works themselves are modulations of a basic embryonic form, and are therefore united as a kind of family by this shared aesthetic.

The organizing theme of Henke’s exhibition was the artist’s notion of a sculpture becoming pregnant. As such, the arrangement of works in intimate groupings (sculptures in small clusters demarcated by black-tape lines directly faced one another so that a viewer could always see one from the front and another from the back) seemed to suggest a series of family narratives. The works’ subtitles also drove these stories: A red and blue zygote and two entwined blue and green figures were subtitled, respectively, *ovule* (egg) and *embrassade* (hug). The various configurations referenced German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger’s therapeutic method, in which a family constellation’s internal dynamics are evaluated to determine the effects of previous familial traumas. In a way, Henke’s intermingling of art-historical and personal points of reference here suggested that the artist was tracing a larger condition at stake in her work, perhaps something like a systemic trauma of art history.

Henke's *Yes, I'm Pregnant!*, a graphic novel in which the protagonists are works from the collection of the Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl in Germany, was also on display. It's a love story about a high-school girl (portrayed by a Marino Marini work) who becomes pregnant by a sculpture of a horse by Paul Dierkes. Lending the various depicted works the character traits of their producers, from Hans Arp to Michael Schwarze, the tongue-in-cheek novel literalizes the conceptual themes of the exhibition. In the end, one might ask what the notion

of a pregnant sculpture could even mean, as Henke both thumbs her nose at the possibility of artistic progeny and declares the inescapability of historical influence. An untitled drawing, digitally printed on a large square sheet of vinyl that was affixed to the gallery's facade, features renderings of different sculptures from the collection in Marl redrawn to incorporate the faces of the artist's family and friends. Marriage, birth, family, and divorce: Are these not accurate metaphors for the conditions of artistic production, which always involves a sloppy psychosocial aspect of one sort or another?

—Karen Butler