

Bettina Sellmann LULU

Between Beauty and Bettina (Trying to resolve reality)

Frank Schroder

"we use pre-assembled fiction to describe reality,
we are happy but a veneer lies around this happiness" B.S.



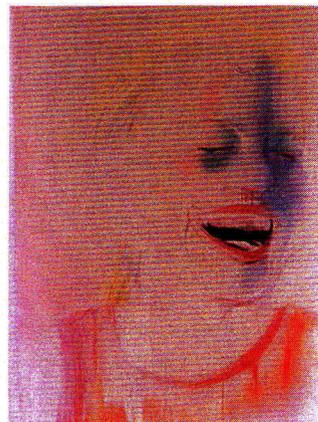
Bettina Sellmann's second exhibition "LuLu" at the hip Galerie Kollmeier features painted portraits of beautiful women in fragile moments of unworldly perfection. The light is bright and everything is white - gallery walls, floors, ceilings and the paintings too. Thin veils of powdery translucent colors almost disappear. The paint becomes a sparse abstract image; laughing, crying, dissolving. It's a perfect and poignant moment, utterly austere and infinitely profound. Sellman is an artist who is both confident and willing to take chances.



paintings function as hyper extensions of these photographs. Happiness, illumination, ecstasy, or dissolution all happen as a frantic attempt not to break through the thin surface.

Sliding on a surface, as Sellmann's paintings suggest, is our normal way of life. If we are only dealing with a plane and there is no perspective - it is not even clear where exactly that plane would be since the characters are curiously absent and present at the same time. There is no irony, no smart-ass wink making sure the viewer gets that "this is not real". The portraits use the fiction of the photograph to describe a sur-reality. The anonymity of the over signified source is a language deciphered by the artist through the collective consciousness between fact and fiction - and, upsetting enough, the trauma becomes therefore even more real. These portraits are no pictures for eternity but bygone moments, if frozen ones, of mortality. Representation is an illusion of found imagery and where it is found is no longer important. Instead, the way we see is the way we feel. The human mind "imprisons itself," creates its reality and pays the price.

The way in which "Lulu" could simply be a girl's name but also stand for "loony", "crazy" or just "hysterical," the portraits raise the question of whether idealized images and subjective vision can coin-



The sources for the paintings are pre-composed found photographic glamour images that serve the artist merely as a sort of memory hint. In her paintings she transforms these seductive pop culture references and forces them into another identity. That identity involves a crisis or impending trauma, or what Francis Bacon would call the "human scream." Performance and cosmetic emotion seem suddenly animated, filled with passion, and the phony becomes touching and scary. Her sobering paintings make the manipulated image present in the photographs and her own personal bashed vision coincide. She is reconstructing the artificiality of the pre-composed imagery and constructing synthesized emotion, devouring the once glamorous images into a vacuum. The alterations occur in veiled vignettes of powdery translucent colors, blue bruises and flowery pink murmurs that permeate the canvas. We find ourselves weakened in the face of pure, unbearable beauty. Like a delicious cake that you are forced to eat far too much of Sellmann's paintings subvert and undermine their source of found perfection. In this sense the

cide. The artist proposes a personal internal fragility. Mirroring the found photographs, she arrives at different versions of them in her own self-inflicted narrative, freed through the catharsis of double artificial bliss. The paintings are essentially celebrating subjectivity, taking unlikely images into the painter-psychological realm of truth and refilling them. In other words, making "unbelievable images believable." □

Bettina Sellmann
Top -Bottom:

Untitled (Birthday), 2001.
acrylic on canvas,
68" x 54".

Untitled (Rose), 2001.
acrylic on canvas,
62" x 50".

Untitled (Laugh 4), 2001.
acrylic on canvas,
74" x 56".