

Midway Contemporary Art

The exhibition *THE GEO POLITICS OF MONETIZED AIRSPACE — Come Fly with Me, I Meet You by the Airside Gucci Concession at 4, Fox Fur Hat* features two works by artists Martha Rosler (b. 1943, USA) and Sarah Staton (b. 1961, UK).

Rosler's *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* (1983 – present) uses installation, photo-text and video montage to look at seemingly abstract and interchangeable spaces of air travel, and at the logistics of labor management associated with them. With her *SupaStore* (1993 – 2000, 2014 – present) Staton examines ways of organizing labor and lives within retail, trade and network structures. Both artists connect these scenarios to the visualization and materialization of public space. The airport and its extended retail space become a showcase for the organization of production chains, in which their embodiment becomes the main cargo. Seen as a method, the airport reaches far beyond its borders, into cities, offices and coffee shops.

Structured as complex and extensive bodies of ongoing work, or as a box-in-a-box set-up, both projects are remarkable for the broad timeframe they capture. Both were started in the early 1980s and 1990s, before internet-based communication, and span through the introduction and widespread adoption of web-based tools we use every day. Continuously and at close range, these projects document the spread of these new communication structures, and allow us to reexamine how they have become embedded within contemporary culture.

Exhibited for the first time in 1993 at Jay Gorney Modern Art in New York, Rosler's *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* consists of a series of photographs taken during her travels as an artist flown to inviting institutions, beginning in 1983. Through this system she became part of a traveling class which, in the 1980s, was out of the reach of most commuters or tourists. Rosler writes about the transition of her own identity from an artist of long-distance buses to one of commercial flights in an early version of her 1998 essay, *In the Place of the Public: Observations of a Frequent Flyer*. Here Rosler explores Henri Lefebvre's concepts (c.f. *The Production of Space*, 1974) in connection to air travel and airports in matters of simulation and representation. She states that "air travel introduces a dislocation or destabilization so complete that it suppresses the realization of where one is, in favor of illusion."

These photographs, accumulated over a long period of time, are installed accompanied by text printed in vinyl letters: single words, word combinations, short sentences, anaphoras, alliterations, and analogies. Together they generate a poetic language where there was once only an opaque one, based on the functional tone of directions, do's, and don'ts, designed for transfer and border zones. As in Rosler's well-known and broadly discussed *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (1974 – 1975), her text-image combinations generate awareness of these spaces as constructed ones. In 1998 *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* was installed at the Frankfurt International Airport by Museum für Moderne Kunst. That same year, Rosler's essay and text-image montages from the *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* were published by Hatje Cantz.

1998 marked a moment when air travel first opened to widespread tourism and low-cost airlines. Seen this way, *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* does not address the politics of air travel today; in her essay, Rosler does, however, use still-current vocabulary to describe the basic aspects of air travel and

the way travelers cope with the spaces that surround them. After the 2001 attacks in New York and the tightening of border and immigration controls that followed, Rosler updated the installation text to focus more strongly on the politics of scrutiny and to demonstrate how they have spread beyond airports to include the spaces of everyday life. A newer reading of *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series* reaches beyond “Observations of a Frequent Flyer” into the “Observations of a life of an Artist” today. These are also the observations of a self-employed commuter, a professor, a contractor, a care worker, an Army officer, a special effects technician — the whole range of a labor force (both legal and illegal) that is in constant movement from one place to another.

The installation presented at Midway shows printed and framed color photographs from the years 1986 to 1992 and a 19-minute-long digital movie with sound and material Rosler shot from 1983 to 2016.

SupaStore Air at Midway Contemporary Art recreates the proto pop-up *SupaStore: Sarah Staton's SupaStore 93*, established by the artist in Charing Cross Road in London, in 1993. *SupaStore* was launched at eleven locations during the nineties — including museums, galleries and artist-run exhibition spaces — and was included in a travelling exhibition meant to explore Eastern Europe, organized by the British Council in 2001. *SupaStore* exploits retail processes to critique the notion of our branded age, thereby posing an ironic comment on the marketing of artistic genius, questioning notions of originality and copying.

Interested in retail as artistic practice, Staton observed the rapidly-changing function of public space within the UK in the early 1990s, marked by the introduction of shopping malls replacing the high street. Staton looked among precedents and her contemporaries for critiques of the role of the artist as unique “author” of their own work; points of reference included Duchamp’s multiple *La Boîte en Valise and the Rotoreliefs (Optical Discs)*, multiples as artforms in general, Oldenburg’s *The Store* and Keith Haring’s long-running *Pop Shop*, and Tracey Emin’s and Sarah Lucas’ *The Shop*. The set-up for the various *SupaStores* was always the same. Sarah Staton invited artists to produce multiples and small artworks that fit in the suitcase of a traveling-artist-as-saleswoman. Staton herself worked on displays and ran the stores, which were set up as exhibitions and as spaces for exchange of various kinds, all under the umbrella of “retail”.

Prior to *SupaStore*, Staton formed *Milch* (in collaboration with Lawren Maben), a gallery space within a large, residential squat at 64-65 Guilford Street, London. They presented exhibitions and dinners and generated a social space within the loose network of the house’s squatters. The first exhibition in 64-65 Guilford Street took place in 1990 under the title *Peace and anarchy & I love form but she doesn't love me & strange flowers & homage to Schnabel equals freedom and fun forever* with Merlin Carpenter, Nils Norman and Sarah Staton. In recent years, Staton has continued collaborations with other artists as an ongoing thread of her diverse practice that encompasses exhibition making, production of artists’ books and creating social sculpture for the public realm. Sarah Staton is Senior Tutor in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art.

Like *Milch*, Staton’s *SupaStore* functioned as a meeting point for a London artists’ community. Staton has described the period of this community as one where it felt like there was no outside; over one hundred artists, ranging in levels of recognition, have participated in *SupaStore*. In this way, *SupaStore* was a

pre-internet hub, materialized through a collection of small objects or things with a more or less definable “use”. The accessibility and straightforward handling of artworks in the *SupaStore* context enabled an exchange of works primarily within the artists’ community itself.

Exhibited at Midway Contemporary Art, *SupaStore* takes on various forms of presence in space and meaning. On the one hand, it is a historic document as an installation, as a reflection and documentation of the past project, simultaneously updated and performed. *SupaStore Air* includes some of the objects originally presented at the stores from 1993 – 2000. Books and videos there suggest a meta-level notion, and provide historical points of reference to today’s wide acceptance of network-lifestyle, consumerism and “shopping” in general. On the other hand, *SupaStore Air* takes on a new iteration through the participation of many artists new to *SupaStore*.

The store display by Sarah Staton includes the symbols of Minerva, the Roman goddess of handicrafts, protector of intellectual and manual skills, and patron of warlike goods and heroes. She is also the goddess of wisdom and reason, represented through her symbols: the owl, the shield and the snake. *SupaStore* is a shop for the time-honoured rituals of trade and exchange.

SupaStore Air includes:

T-Shirts designed by Saelia Aparicio, Gerry Bibby and Henrik Olesen, Merlin Carpenter, Jeremy Deller, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, NSRD (designed by HIT), Ken Kagami, Josephine Pryde, Sarah Staton, Paula Linke, Demelza Watts as well as Nolan Simon for PROVENCE.

SupaStore Air includes objects such as Gamarelli stockings from Rome, artists’ books, magazines and fanzines, SupaStock: objects from the previous *SupaStore* iterations and other artworks by:

Agenzia delle Entrate, Tasha Amini, Fiona Banner, Ejaz Christilano, Clare Corrigan, Jude Crilly, Aaron Flint Jamison, Freee art collective, GAS (Kelsey Olson and Katelyn Farstad), Alison Gill, Chiara Giovando, Anthea Hamilton and Julie Verhoeven, Matthew Higgs, Alex Israel, Alison Jones and Milly Thompson, Steve Kado, Tobias Kaspar, Lito Kattou, Miguel Soto Karelavic, Nina Könnemann, Adriana Lara, Paula Linke, Adam McEwen, Sean McNanney, Ariane Müller, Hadrian Pigott, Giulia Piscitelli, Lesley Smailes, Gavin Turk, Nicole Wermers, Seyoung Yoon and Anand Zenz.

Many of the objects at *SupaStore Air* are for sale, please visit the gallery’s front desk to speak with a Midway staff member if you are interested in making a purchase.