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## CHICAGO

## Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven

## THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY

"Electric Ladyland," the title of curator Hamza Walker's essay for Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven's recent exhibition at the Renaissance Society, is a spot-on nickname for "In a Saturnian World," the Belgian artist's latest and nearly unnavigable gaping opus. "Electric Ladyland" also befits Van Kerckhoven's background as a trained graphic artist who since 1981 has been both an active member of Antwerp's experimental-music scene and someone who has long embraced an array of visual languages in the studio to explore various polemical, philosophical positions. The characterization of "electric" also literally applied to this exhibition's intermedia work, which included computer animation, digitally derived prints, and two online interactive Quicktime works, *Pluriform I* and *Pluriform II*, both 2011. Extending this current, Van Kerckhoven interspersed a selection of bracingly vivid if clumsily expressionistic drawings, panel paintings, and Richard Hawkins-like figure collages amid the seamless, digitally produced pieces.

All of these works were installed across the recto and verso of several freestanding walls and arranged on the diagonal, to cut across the ninety-seven-year-old Renaissance Society's voluminous space. The converging angles of such massive partitions appeared like the pages of multiple open, architecturally scaled books. Painted half white and half black or grayish-green, each wall had been bisected into upper and lower regions, thereby reinforcing a binary system of organization that structured Van Kerckhoven's otherwise riotous meditations on image production. The graphic bicolored walls also hosted digital projections, flat-screen monitors, and a large selection of color-saturated computer printouts. Whether animated or static, all the digital works contain a mash-up of images, text, and abstract forms spawned from the exploits of digital scanning and Photoshop.



Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Ni Totem, ni Tabou*, 2011, digital print on PVC, 39 3/8 x 52".

In one region—on the backside of one of the built walls—Van Kerckhoven had installed an intimate line of five small framed works on paper, each fringed with ragged perforations where the paper had been detached from a spiral sketchbook, as in *Turning Mountains into Sea*, 2011. A stark collage depicting a cutout female face awash in an atmospheric landscape, it is haunting, beautiful, and evocative of the anomalous heads of Odilon Redon. The interior space in *Obscure-Moi*, 2011, is equally economical, with its scant linear notations and single

collaged element, culled from a fashion magazine. Though the drawings are small in scale, the degree of melancholia they radiate is tremendous and was only heightened by their contrast with the digitally produced surfaces that surrounded them.

Built into this folio-like installation was a series of fourteen drawings from 2010 that each feature twelve colored circles systematically arranged into an orderly grid. Maps that order celestial bodies, these compositions propose pseudoscientific and mystical practices of reasoning that differ from Van Kerckhoven's erotic collages and her electronic musings. Influenced by the cosmological theories of Giordano Bruno, these studies of sorts drift from "Perspectief," an arrangement of circles filled in by slightly misaligned splotches of color, to "Shiseido," a drawing anchored by brilliant red orbs set among mysterious diagrammatic notations and advertising buzzwords pulled from the Japanese hair-care and cosmetic company: SUPER CORRECTIVE SERUM and BIO-PERFORMANCE.

However, Bruno is not Van Kerckhoven's only reference. She has also employed the writings of the mystic Marguerite Porete and the philosopher Herbert Marcuse. Van Kerckhoven's approach, channeling divergent metaphysical positions through a disparate array of visual mediums and an endless well of strategies—analytical, didactic, and expressive—to carve out a field of interpretation, is reminiscent of that of another "electric lady," performer Valentine de Saint-Point, author of "The Futurist Manifesto of Lust." Embracing an amalgam of styles, theories, and methods—including Symbolism, geometry, and the depersonalization of the artist—Van Kerckhoven appeared here as a Futurist feminist, engaged as much in new media as in the new visual systems and regimes from which these new technologies emerged.

—Michelle Grabner