



Luisa Kasalicky, *Synonym for Group Seven*, 2019, tempera, gouache, and oil on canvas, 78 3/4 × 74 3/4".

## Luisa Kasalicky

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It was difficult to approach Luisa Kasalicky's "*Tiefschlaf in der Stadt*" (Deep Sleep in the City) without thinking of Adolf Loos, the preeminent Viennese architect of modernity. His polemic "Ornament and Crime," published in 1913, was a seminal denunciation of the Secessionist idiom: the Art Nouveau style still associated with the city's turn-of-the-century avant-gardism. Arguing on both moral and economic grounds, Loos claimed that "the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects." Just over a

century later, in works dating from between 2014 and 2020, Kasalicky probed the formal, material, and institutional conventions that continue to shape our understanding of the boundaries between utilitarian objects and art.

Her boldest conceptual gesture in this vein was to hang her painting *Synonym for Group Seven*, 2019, on a true-to-scale, fresco-like acrylic-on-cotton replica of her own studio wall, executed by the artist Domenico Mühle. The painting has a deliciously pink surface decorated with abstract shapes that come close to denoting real objects but that might collapse into formal ambiguity were it not for the compositional context—four red planes, for instance, might suggest a window. In seeming allegiance to Henri Matisse’s decorative touch, she has set signifiers of a debonair lifestyle (a martini glass, cherries, a wrapped bonbon) floating across the field. With the grayish replica of her studio wall as a host surface, this two-part installation, titled *Wall*, 2019, dramatized the decorative destination of many artistic objects exhibited on gallery walls in anticipation of entering domestic spaces or adorning various institutional contexts.

I couldn’t help but think of Daniel Buren’s seminal essay “The Function of the Studio” (1971), in which he argues that the modernist space of production already includes within its precincts the systems, ideologies, and expectations of an art object’s eventual space of display. But unlike Buren, with his call to analyze the institutionalization of art, Kasalicky focuses on the (market-driven) demand and desire for objects that straddle the limit between functionality and decoration. She explores this malleability in *Untitled*, 2019, a sgraffito fresco in which the lexicon of motifs from *Synonym for Group Seven* reappears: The martini glass and cherries are now engraved into the plaster as so many anonymous scratch marks, while the wall is depicted in greater detail with the addition of painted bricks. To perhaps state the obvious, Kasalicky is asking us to consider the transformation of a common urban sight—a wall covered with graffiti—into an almost quaint bit of pinkish bric-a-brac.

While such conceptual exercises could easily become pedantic, Kasalicky's work is animated by its insouciance. Ornamental aspects are exaggerated in *Chain\**, 2020, a sculptural object reminiscent of a charm bracelet, while the cartoonishly portrait-like *Profil I* and *Profil II*, both 2019, suggest that raffish characters inhabit the artist's off-kilter environment. We appeared to be in a dreamworld of capitalism, a realm in which functionality, fun, and desire go hand in hand. Indeed, the exhibition's title, "Deep Sleep in the City," brought us into conversation with another patriarch of Viennese modernity, Loos's elder contemporary Sigmund Freud. Kasalicky situates herself as both analyst and analysand, working through the unconscious of modernity and its symptoms to suggest that any ideological limit between art and everyday objects consists merely of conventions that can be shifted by being rearticulated.

— Nuit Banai