

“Fükengrüven”

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“Driving enjoyment” is the rough English translation of Volkswagen’s 1990 advertising slogan. The German mantra—*Fahrvergnügen*—projected ease and playfulness and quickly spawned a decal, seen on cruisers like the VW Bus, that featured a linguistically modified axiom: *Fükengrüven*. That easy-livin’ motto is now the title of a group exhibition comprising prints, sculptures, and paintings. Here, the advertised ease of operating Volkswagen machinery acts as metaphor to the artists’ comfortable handling of tools and materials. In this respect, “Fükengrüven” retains the TV spots’ joyful sentiment while expanding from its original connotation.

With its undulating divisions of space, Phil Cote’s *Two Paintings (variation)* (all works cited, 2012) could easily be understood as a landscape painting: In it, a hillside glimmers gleefully while vibrant confetti dashes shower anomalously from the painting’s upper half. The thick, ecstatic paint strokes carry over in another horizontal painting of the same name, which could show a mountain range, albeit one featuring color-blocked stripes ascending its incline and a glaring circular eye. Cote’s imagery exults in abstraction while hinting at representation—an attractive visual dialogue. *Black Smiley* and *Sad Confusion* are two contact C-print “colorgrams” by Pia Howell. Mostly monochrome, the prints show irregular twists and curves with scattered splashes of indigo. Often the forms resemble smiley-face expressions. At other times they’re moustaches, and in one case a pair of breasts appears. Howell’s technique is an organic play with light in the vein of Man Ray’s photograms, but her studies experiment just as much with photography and printmaking as they do with humor.

Fükengrüven’s dancing colors and geometric sequences evoke the early-1990s visual motifs that influenced the exhibited artists. More significant, however, the show’s refreshing, direct concept and the gallery’s artist-run organization recall the formative years of 1970s alternative art, when artist communities accepted foreseeable hardships for a worthwhile reward, organizing untitled showings of new work amid a mood that was *fuckin’ groovin’*.