

Aura of the Night

On entering the rooms of the Kunstverein Mönchengladbach, visitors are surrounded by an icy silence. A chill which seems to be emanating from the cold floor is making its presence felt on the skin. Magically, the eye is drawn to the bright projection providing a focus amid the almost total darkness of the room. Slowly yet in a peculiarly jumpy manner, images of leaf structures are moving about a fragile, transparent sheet of glass. Bit by bit the eye scans the environment, until through the projection the dim silhouette of a large sculpture, whose cleft surface is reminiscent of solidified lava, takes shape against the black foil of the surroundings. What at first stands in sharp contrast to the luminous surface of the video projection, now emerges, on closer examination, as a fusion of two elements at once disparate yet conditioning each other. This untitled “video sculpture” once more exposes the power of light, which, in the form of bright reflections, elicits scintillating flashes from the jet-black surface. The grey shading of the leaves, with colors ranging from silver-green to brownish-white, imbues the inanimate stone with a vibrant depth. The heavy, monolithic sculpture seems to come to life, even to start moving. The open display of the requisite technical equipment does not at all weaken the aura of coldness, abandonment and the feeling of self-absorption; rather, the various elements coalesce into a “Gesamtkunstwerk” in which the locality, too, is part of this artistic orchestration. Nicola Schrudde perceives and acts with a sculptor’s vision; this perspective signifies the starting point of all her visual ventures.

Schrudde subtly portrays the rhythms of the elements with their undulations of light and shadow, day and night, rain and sunshine. Setting out with her camera, she captures the multifarious beauty of nature. Dispensing with the use of a tripod, she freezes brief moments of reality, catches winks of waxing and waning. Close-ups reveal the poetic leaf formations on which the dew twinkles in the sunlight. With her recordings, she transcends the “division between concrete reality and one’s own inner presence.” The images speak of travels, of other places, of the artist’s personal memories, and not least of the mysteries of nature, which she gathers into the

exhibition.

Like flora and fauna adapting to their environment, the artist reacts to the spatial setup she encounters. She juxtaposes the architectural structures of the man-made surroundings with the grown textures of an inventive nature. The extreme close-ups of individual leaves of bushes or trees reveal their vibrant lifelines, which at the same time tell of the vulnerability of their surface. It takes only one movement and the fragile natural fabric, which has taken thousands of years to evolve, is destroyed. In Schrudde's microcosm, the iron framework of the architectural environment visually intertwines with the natural appearance of the plants. With her work, the artist is introducing a sense of scenic expanse into the limited spatiality of the room, thus shifting the distinct boundaries separating the inside from the outside and moving them closer to the essence of things and the viewer's heart. Akin to the rhythm of day and night, this artist from Düsseldorf creates sculptures for darkness. Just like clouds obscuring the horizon, the artist dims the rooms of the Kunstverein, sharpening the senses of the people who have to find their way in her nocturnal landscape – if also helped by the meticulous arrangement of the exhibits. Thus, a projection of night-glistening foliage is transformed into a veritable guiding light for the visitors, which, by dint of its central position, functions as a brace connecting both storeys of the exhibition space. Through the relatively elevated position of the exhibit, the gaze shifts onto the next floor, and attracted by the movement there, the visitor climbs the iron steps up to the next level.

The reverberating sounds created by moving around on the metal sheets and gratings dotting the ground emphasize the quasi-lunar atmosphere. As in a meteorite shower, silvery glistening stone formations of different sizes lie scattered on the hard floor. Carefully, one's steps are directed around the seemingly randomly placed sculptures. The gaze intently focused downward, one acts as if on a hike on uneven ground. The path ends just in front of an opened ladder which, tree-like, ascends to the heavens of the gallery space. At first glance no more than a forgotten object, it not only serves as a carrier of the multimedia technology employed, but also, in its iron-clad guise, augments the installation as yet another sculpture simultaneously marking the final point of the exhibition.

In Schrudde's work, inconspicuous details are transformed into crucial elements. Thus, the shadow on a wall thrown by a glass plate sealed with anthracite paper assumes the character of a lunar eclipse, whose glaring circumference is created by the piercing light of the projector. The various elements enter into a dialogue with their environment, enhancing it and opening up new spatial dimensions, thus creating a symbiosis of real architectural interior and artificial nature.

In their visual arrangement, the video installations simultaneously address the multilayered processes of remembering and forgetting. As in memories stored in the brain, actual experiences gradually disintegrate, asserting their independence so that they can never be caught in a single image. The swaying of the leaves on video, whose filmic movement is created by the succession of single distinct images, reflects the natural model through the gaze of the artist. In this, the entire image area is treated equally. No element stands out, no part is given exceptional attention. Through the different speeds of the images, the individual leaves merge with their background and branches. Sunbeams falling on dew or raindrops create lively reflexes of light, which are reminiscent of bright brush strokes in a monochrome painting. For her work, Schrudde draws on the enigma of nature. Organic geometry describes the search for the main principles of growth and time and its traces in objects. The artist here brings to mind Marcel Proust, who, with his masterly descriptions, illustrates that there is no uniform reality but simply subjective notions of truth revealing a host of unique individual microcosms. For Nicola Schrudde, this approximation to the phenomena of nature represents the only way to experience the mysteries of the natural world without breaking their spell.

Opening speech to the exhibition:
Nicola Schrudde /
Video Installation with Sculptures
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