

Aura of the Night

On entering the rooms of the Kunstverein Mönchengladbach, one is surrounded by an icy silence. A chilliness marks its presence on the skin and slowly rises from the cold floor. Magically, the eye is drawn to the bright projection, which promises a focus within the almost total darkness of the room. A slow, strangely abrupt image series of leaf structures move on a fragile, transparent surface of glass. Piece by piece 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 lucid surface of the video projection, now emerges, on closer examination, as a fusion of two disparate elements, which at the same time condition each other. This “video sculpture”, without title, once again discloses the power of light, which, in the form of bright reflections, casts scintillating flashes on the deep black surface. The grey shading of the leaves, whose spectrum extends from silver-green to brownish-white, charms out of the dead stone a lively depth. The heavy, monolithic sculpture seems called to life, even moving. Openly displayed technology does not at all demystify the aura of coldness, abandonment and the feeling of being “alone with oneself.” Rather, the elements join to one complete work of art in which the locality, too, is part of this artistic orchestration. Nicola Schrudde sees and acts with the vision of the sculptor; it signifies the starting point of all her visual ventures.

Schrudde sensitively picks up the rhythm of the elements with their undulations of light and shadow, day and night, rain and sun. With her 35mm camera she hits the road and captures the multifarious beauty of nature. Without tripod, she freezes brief moments of reality, catches winks of waxing and waning. Close-ups lay open the poetic leaf formations on which the dew twinkles in the sunlight. With her photographs, 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 brings into the exhibition.

Like flora and fauna adapting to their environment, the artist reacts to the room setting she encounters. She meets the architectural structure of the man-made surroundings with the grown structures 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 construct of natural development, which has taken thousands of years to evolve, is destroyed. In Schrudde's microcosm, the iron framework of the architectural environment visually grows together with the natural gown of the plants. With her work, the artist is introducing scenic expanse into the limited spatiality of the room. She thereby shifts the defined borders of internal and external and sets it closer to the soul of the things and the viewer. Like the rhythm of day and night, this artist from Düsseldorf creates sculptures for darkness. Similar to clouds which shade the horizon, the artist dims the rooms of the Kunstverein and sharpens the senses of the people, who have to find their way in the night-time landscape; of help is the accurate arrangement of the exhibits.

Thus, a projection of night-glistening foliage becomes the guide-system for the people, which, through its central position, functions as a connecting element of both stories. Through the relatively high placement 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.

Walking on that ground of metal tiling and gratings, the reverberating sound emphasises the lunar-like atmosphere. As in a meteorite shower, silvery glistening stone formations of different sizes lie on the hard floor. Carefully, one's steps are directed around the almost randomly placed sculptures. The gaze intently focused downward, one acts as if on a hike on uneven ground. The path stops shortly before an opened ladder, which, like a tree, reaches to the heavens of the gallery space. At first glance, as if forgotten, it functions not only as a bearer of multimedia technology, but rather, it enlarges in its iron structure the installation of another sculpture, which at the same time marks the final point of the exhibition.

In Schrudde's artwork, unimposing details develop into the work's main elements. Thus, a glass plate sealed with anthracite paper lends to its shadow on the opposite wall the character of a lunar eclipse, whose gleaming seam is created through the illuminating light of the projector. The subjects enter into a dialogue with their environment, broaden it, open up new scopes of space and create a symbiosis of real interior and artificial nature.

In their visual arrangement, the video installations at once address the multilayered process of remembering and forgetting. As in the memory storage of the brain, lived reality disintegrates piece by piece, separates, becomes independent and can never be caught in a single image. The

swaying of the leaves on video, whose filmic movement are created by the succession of single 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 area is given exceptional attention. Through the different speed of the images, the individual leaves merge with their background and branches. Sun beams falling on dew or raindrops place lively reflexes of light, which are reminiscent of bright brush strokes in a monochrome painting. For her work, Schrudde draws from the enigma of nature. Organic geometry describes the search for the main principles of growth and time and its traces in objects. With this, the artist offers a relation to Marcel Proust, who, with his masterly descriptions, illustrates that there is no supposed reality or truth, but simply subjective notions of truth, which reveal singular individual microcosms. For Nicola Schrudde, this approximation to the appearance of nature represents the only way to experience the mystery of things without breaking its spell.

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Opening words to the exhibition:
Nicola Schrudde /
Video Installation with Sculptures
at Kunstverein Mönchengladbach
on 15 November 2008