

Images Against Darkness

Video art from the imai archive at KIT

28.4. – 24.6.2012

Images Against Darkness will be KIT's fourth show on the theme of video art since the exhibition space's inception. Following on from shows by Julia Stoschek (*Video Koop*, 2008), Mischa Kuball (*Along the Rhine*, 2009) and Silke Schmickl (*Human Frames*, 2011), the collaboration on this occasion has been with Renate Buschmann from imai – inter media art institute. The curator of the exhibition, who specialises in media and video art, has been the director of the foundation – situated in the Ehrenhof, Düsseldorf – since 2008. The foundation was established in 2006 with the aim of discovering quality, as well as archiving and conserving, distributing and disseminating video art. The archive ranges chronologically from the early 1970s to the present day. imai will present its considerable collection of video treasures to a wider audience and demonstrate the thematic wealth and depth of the works in the archive.

With its motto “video art at the click of a mouse”, the freely accessible online catalogue is effectively a permanent display window for imai's video archive, which can be viewed at all times in digital format and – here specifically – next to the ticket desk. However, the preservation of film in the archive has itself taken on a pictorial format for the exhibition in the form of an analogue wall of monitors in the foyer: leitmotifs from international video art can be viewed on the almost historic 4:3 monitors from the 1970s until the present day, including many of the pioneering works by artists, such as **Klaus vom Bruch**, **Bettina Gruber**, **Marcel Odenbach**, **Ulrike Rosenbach** and **Maria Vedder**, who began their careers in the Rhineland. **Douglas Davis's** performance “The last nine minutes” will also be shown, for which the artist opted for medium of television to broadcast the opening of *documenta 6* which became the first ever live satellite transmission on German TV. Or the video “Smoke nights” (1990) by the performance duo **Raskin** (Rotraut Pape and Andreas Coerper) which borrows from the talkshow format where smoking was permitted until the 1990s. Instead of the usual guests engaging in empty chit-chat, we see the rising billows of their exhaled cigarette smoke that – like ‘speech balloons’ – become the vehicle for their nebulous messages. **Gary Hills** early videos “Mirror Road” (1975/76) and “Bits” (1977) are also exemplary for the design processes that have developed from video technology and the additional deployment of computers.

Sunjha Kim's work “[j]” (2011) was made a full 34 years later: the video which is shown here as the first individual installation in the hallway, focuses upon the elongated vertical typography and sound of the sibilant as it appears in phonetic typography. Sunjha Kim has discovered several correlatives in nature which she weaves together in a bold chiaroscuro contrast and with fluid, poetic transitions. The young artist, together with **Sachli Golkar** and **Kevin Pawel Matweew** are recent additions to imai's collection and reflects the foundations commitment not merely to preserve the archive in its historical condition, but also to build upon it as an ongoing project. The exhibition *Images against Darkness* has provided an ideal opportunity to rejuvenate the archive and to incorporate current artistic positions.

Gudrun Kemsas “Private” (2011) follows “[j]”. If many of Gudrun Kemsas video works thrive upon the speed of dynamic tracking shots that frequently capture

essential images of urban life in the modern metropolis, in her video *Private*, the artist opens up the view into private interior space. The rotating tracking shot, which is initially taken to be a 360° revolution, soon reveals itself to be a never-ending expedition through a labyrinthine network of perpetually different apartments flooded with light.

In the next contribution, **Norbert Meissner** invites the viewer to enter a typical passport photo booth which can be found on various public concourses. Instead of self-portraits, the viewer sees cinema classics in rapid succession. Norbert Meissner has edited down and compressed the central sequences into approximately two minutes and “Filmfax” (1989/2012) becomes an impressive and ultimately mischievous attempt to take our consumption of films to extremes.

By contrast, the adjacent four-channel video installation “Le Jardin Secret” (2006) by **Lydia Schouten** is far more disturbing. Surrounded by four projection surfaces, the viewer participates in disturbing episodes that take place within a seemingly idyllic, woodland milieu. In the partially narrative structure, grotesque attacks by animals and enigmatic, morbid incidents between the individuals inspire flights of horrifying fantasy. In another complete change of mood, **Kevin Pawels Matweew’s** untitled video from 2008 demands quite concentration. His four images are from an urban environment and suspend the rigid dichotomy between the moving image and the film still – the subtle shift from photography to video is accompanied by passages with or without sound.

Two compilations composed specially for the exhibition will be shown in the KIT cinema:

“**Win ! The Games**” can be seen on the stairway screen and was inspired by the impending sporting event of 2012: the Olympic Games. In the videos here the artists have adopted various perspectives on sporting competitions that transcend the ubiquitous motto “higher, faster, further”. **Dara Birnbaum’s** video collage *Pop-Pop Video: General Hospital/Olympic Woman Speed Skating* (1980) places the physical performance levels of a speed skater in the context of trivial television entertainment. In her video *Aufwärts zum Mount Everest* (“Upwards to Mount Everest”) (1983), **Ulrike Rosenbach** questions the physical trials and ambition necessary to accomplish this legendary feat of mountaineering. Whereas **Julián Álvarez’s** video *El Ring* (1989) transforms the encounter of two pugilists into a kind of dance, **Bill Seaman’s** *The Boxer’s Puzzle* (1986) provides insight into the psychological side of shadow-boxing. In addition, **Franziska Megert’s** *Time Addiction* (2007) not only demonstrates the mercilessly rapid passage of time, but also, above all, the ecstatic human acclimatisation to ever greater speeds.

The lower part of the cinema section to the rear is devoted to virtual pictorial worlds featured in the entrance to KIT in the form of “**Explore ! Virtuality**”: ranging from **Steina and Woody Vasulka’s** *Noisefields* (1974) via audiovisual montage and rhythmatisations in videos by **Claus Blume** (*Eclipse*, 1984), **Peter Callas** (*The Esthetics of Disappearance*, 1986) and **George Barber** (*Arizona*, 1994) to the historically motivated animations in **Myriam Thyès’s** *Caribbean Carnivals* (2006) and the virtual pull of a Mackintosh interface in **Peter Simons 69** (2008).

Michalis Nicolaides refers to KIT's situation as a part of the underground traffic system in the tunnel beneath the Rhine Promenade: his work *My Space* (2012), conceived specifically for the current exhibition, leads the viewer into a confusing game with reality and illusion to the neighbouring asphalt "pistes" upon which 60,000 cars travel daily, and hones our eye for the pragmatic as well as alienated use of urban space.

The artist duo **Hörner/Antlfinger** also allude to the shifting meaning attached to a location in their sculptural, audiovisual work "Dream Water Wonderland" (2010): after Kalkar's construction had become the centre of intense controversy, it was reinvented as a gigantic amusement park. Hörner/Antlfinger confront images of the amusement park with model-like references to the underground nuclear waste repository ASSE II of which the latent radioactive threat is still a matter for debate.

Sachli Golkar's three-part work *Mehrere* (2012), comprising one fictional and two documentary parts, conflates the pictorial language of feature and documentary film. The three conceptually-related videos will be presented separately: the fictional part will be screened at KIT, whereas the two documentary parts will be shown at the Düsseldorf Filmwerkstatt.

Video performances in particular, i.e. performances which were enacted by the artist generally without an audience, especially for video recording, form a key component within the imai archive, and indeed continue to do so. Thus **Patricia Hoeppe** has developed an interactive continuation of her performance *Flamingo* (2003) especially for KIT. Whereas in the video *Flamingo*, it was Hoeppe herself and a partner who could be seen on the edge of a verdant woodland lake, handling pink plug-in modules that resembled flamingos on account of their colour and stilt-like appearance, in the case of *Flamingo – Sitting Lines of Flux* (2012), it is the exhibition visitor who now finds himself in the middle of the installation. By means of a closed-circuit configuration, visitors are filmed trying out the at-the-ready plug-in modules and their images simultaneously projected onto the opposite wall, where plug-in modules have also been mounted to disrupt the neutrality of the projection surface.

Robert Cahen's video *Le Cercle* (2005) invites contemplative viewing. The work is the result of a journey by the artist through Spitzbergen, a region where phases of permanent darkness alternate with those of permanent light, in tune with the rhythm of the seasons. Cahen mounts Arctic panoramas with close-ups of the exhibition participants, whose solarised portraits are successively swallowed up by superimposed, fiercely bright whiteness. The decelerated movement of the people in this visually stunning landscape engenders an equally intensive visual experience and the impression of timelessness.

Jan Verbeek's installation *Sisyphos* (1994/2012), situated in the apex of the tunnel, is bathed in green light. The conjunction of movement and simultaneous deceleration of the video image is of central importance for this work, which had already been shown in 1994 before KIT's inception when the tunnel was an artist-run space. Whilst the quickly flickering video silhouette of a running man wanders across the surrounding walls surrounded by the darkness of the room, the actual running movement is transposed into slow motion. The green, luminous Sisyphus

indefatigably completes his lap and “flies” past the heads of the viewers and away across the warning lights spread across the floor.

We are also showing “Seventeen Grand Narratives for a new Grand Canyon” (2005) upstairs in the café. The video is derived from material filmed by the artist **Nate Harrison** in the course of three weeks at Ground Zero. Harrison was not specifically interested in producing a work with explicit reference to the 9/11 tragedy, what interested him more was the behaviour of the tourists on what is effectively his doorstep. He noticed people’s compulsion to film something that is no longer physically present, that is to say, an obsession with the “empty” atmosphere hitherto occupied by the Twin Towers. It seemed as though people from all over the world were busy staging their own grand narrative of history.

Exhibition concept:
Exhibition architecture:
Artistic direction KIT – Kunst im Tunnel:
Exhibition planning imai:

Dr. Renate Buschmann
Dejan Mujicic
Gertrud Peters
Britta Göllner

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Contact

KIT – Kunst im Tunnel Dirk Schewe Mannesmannufer 1b D-40213 Düsseldorf
Tel.: +49(0)211 8996 256 Fax: +49(0)211 8929576
presse@kunst-im-tunnel.de www.kunst-im-tunnel.de