

Skulpturale Handlungen ('sculptural narration')

The Modern Movement is attributed with having liberated men and women from social conventions. But the radical break with the past did not arrive until the 1960s. A new way of looking at the relationship between the sexes, women's emancipation, the questioning of social power structures and the disappearance of moral constraints made it possible to develop a new perception of the body that found its expression in Performance and Body Art. The body as seen by the artist was no longer a representation of the human form but a material to be used as an active part of the creative process. In doing so, limits were transgressed and taboos were broken in an attempt to venture into new worlds of experience.

The image of the body in contemporary art has its origins in the Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s. Whereas Sixties art was primarily concerned with the realisation and rediscovery of the human body and its status in society, the Post-Modern theorists have taken this approach a decisive step further. Instead of asking "What is my body?" they now ask "How do I want my body to look?" and "Where does it stand in relation to the surrounding environment?". It is in this domain that the artists featured in this exhibition, entitled "Skulpturale Handlungen" ('sculptural narration') have chosen to work. Through the media of sculpture, photography, video and performance, they investigate the way the human body is conditioned and manipulated by external forces.

In her video entitled "Rücksicht/heed 360°", **Patricija Gilyte** stands all alone on an empty beach, wrapped in an outsized sheet of plastic foam, buffeted by the winds. The silhouette of her body is barely detectable beneath the wilful material. The main protagonist in this theatrical performance directed by the forces of nature is the wind, which gently impresses a changing pattern of waves in the plastic foam. Fascinated by its flexibility, Patricija Gilyte has created a whole series of performances using the foam sheet and documented them on video. The central theme of her work is the human body in its interaction with nature. A typical example is her work entitled "Corvidae" in which an oak tree is populated with mysterious people wearing dark-coloured clothes. Like crows, they perch in the branches and seem to form a unity with the tree. But when you look more closely, you realise that each one is a cloned image of the artist.

On the other hand, what strange motivation could have possessed the artist **Isabel Haase** to take a book and settle down to read at the bottom of the ocean? To create her video work "Ciao, you know where to find me", she descended into the waters off the coast of Crete. Gently rocked by the current, she finds peace amidst multicoloured fish, shellfish and coral. This vision of poetic contemplation required enormous physical effort to produce, even though it looks so effortless on the video screen. Isabel Haase deliberately eschews the use of digital image processing techniques. Her work is the result of physical exertion, accomplished without any external aid. The observer is totally unaware of the extreme effort involved in its creation.

Similar confusion was provoked by **Claudia Djabbari**, when she and a fellow artist staged a ballet performance in a Munich metro station to the classical music regularly piped through the PA system as a diversion for passengers waiting on the platforms. Her action work "Kultur am Goetheplatz/ ein Bauern-Pas de Deux" ('Culture at Goetheplatz / a rustic pas de deux') has a dreamlike quality by contrast with its everyday urban setting. A far more pragmatic approach is evident in the object taken from her work "Sitzende Tätigkeit" ('Sedentary work'), a strange cross between a shooting stick and a corset, that allows a person to remain "upright" even in a profession that demands long hours of standing. In this way she illustrates the body's manipulation by external forces in a human environment shaped by cultural processes.

The works of **Nezaket Ekici** follow the tradition set by the body-related performances of the 1960s and 70s. What makes them all the more provocative is the fact that Ekici is not only a woman but also a Muslim. For example, in her volume of photographs "My

"Pig", she evokes the breaking of taboos by showing a veiled woman with a pig, an animal deemed impure in Islamic culture. The photographic work was produced in association with the performance "No Pork But Pig", in which she built up a relationship with the animal over the course of several hours. Another of her performances, "Screaming Feathers", in which she addresses the topical issue of avian flu, also takes up the theme of how we relate to animals in our society. Enveloped in protective clothing and surrounded by a flock of squawking hens, she slits open feather cushions, making the feathers fly wildly all over the place. The furious scenario she creates in this way deliberately awakens our unconscious fears. For the exhibition she has chosen to display three works under the common title of "Cages", because they each in their own way reflect the feeling of isolation and restriction.

The work "escape" by **Anne Wodtcke**, in which she inserts her body into two giant-sized paper bags, might easily be likened to an experimental set-up. Wodtcke, whose artistic development was heavily influenced by the simple life in a mud hut in West Africa, is fascinated by the fact that, by the simplest of means, the paper bags define a space that remains concealed from the observer. Self-fabricated paper bags are also the main protagonists in her six-part photo series "shift", in which she repeatedly sets body and space in relation to one another in varied ways. The definition of a hidden space, an intimate place in a public setting, is the theme of her project "mental sculpture", which was specially conceived for the exhibition. For this work she intends to install 50 small paper bags around the city and leave them to their own devices. Concealed inside the bags are short lines of text. As in the case of Wodtcke's monumental paper objects in the installation "lift off", the observer is invited to stick his or her nose inside, at the very least.

The relationship between a consciously active subject and a passive object is also the theme of the installation "The intelligent table" by **Vassileia Stylianidou**. She has chosen to use a black box measuring 3x3 metres as the scene of her investigation. The starting point is a table, a ubiquitous item of everyday life, and the artist herself. In a large-format video projection on the outside wall of the box, she approaches the object with the intent of making contact, bending down, leaning on the surface, or pulling up a chair and sitting down. But what would happen if the table were to respond to the artist? If the object were no longer passive, but capable of independent action, like the appliances in the intelligent home? Stylianidou goes on to explore this hypothesis inside the black box. She strokes her hands over the surface of the table, which gives way to her touch like pliant dough. At present, Vassileia Stylianidou's visions are still no more than computer-animated dreams, and hence the intelligent table inside the black box exists merely as a fragment – a pair of trestles and a slide projection, but no table top.

How much can a human being actually withstand? And how many hardships are people willing to accept in the name of science and so-called progress? These are the questions that **Christian Engelmann** sets out to answer with his "Centrifuge", a device that resembles those used in space centres to verify the fitness of astronauts in training. Engelmann's installation is halfway between a child's playground toy and an instrument of torture. Brave visitors are invited to take a spin and test the limits of their own capacity. But don't expect a ticket for a journey into space as a reward for submitting to the torture!

English translation by Sheba van Iersel