

Annelies Strba

France und die Elfen

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Annelies Strbà came to video more or less by chance. The organisers of the Antechamber exhibition at London's Whitechapel Gallery wanted to commission video portraits of the participating artists. Strbà preferred to make the portrait herself, and bought a video camera to do so. In the resulting film, her first video film, MAX, 1997, she mirrors herself in her daughters. The film is set in the kitchen, where many of her photographs were also taken. Her daughters are setting the table and clearing it again, going through the motions of cooking, playing with the cat: it is a theatre of the absurd, portraying all manner of things that have taken place in the kitchen in the course of the past twenty years. the two main characters move as a trance-like ballet, recorded in slow motion, with blurring and heightening, and with the bright colours of the clothes bleeding out. The camera is immersed in the action, sinking into the vibrant and somehow exhilaratingly ritualised flow of the afternoon, propelled by external stimuli, colour tones and rapidly sketched spatial dynamics. From now on, Strbà takes her images entirely from the video camera, choosing stills which she then enlarges in different formats. All that she will say about her choice of stills is that there are never very many potentially suitable images. After the black-and-white photo canvases of the early years, the digital video stills up to 2003 are mounted on photographic paper under glass or new technique of canvas prints. This form of "behind-glass photography", which gains added potency in the large scale format, imbues the images with an air of lucidity and transparency. Whereas her works were already quite literally Lichtbilder - "light pictures" - to use an early German term for photography (most notably in the case of the treble slide projection Shades of time) the video stills seem to be filled with even more light... ..In Strbà's early works, one has the impression that the artist's presence alone - when she "opens the shutter and closes her eyes" - is quite enough to influence and alter her motifs. Does this make the artist a medium, a visionary, a magnetic force field? Strangely enough, she herself remains an unwritten page in the midst of these tales; an enigma and, in the words of Georg Kohler, an "invisible centre"... ..The works Annelies Strbà refers to casually as the "city videos" were originally planned as a trilogy: NY (1999), Paris (1999) and Berlin (2000). Later, the short tape Venice (2001) was added, though it is not, strictly speaking, a "city video", and later still New York (2001). As in Max and, particularly, in Koi, the original idea for NY, Paris and Berlin was a simple one. Strbà took a trip around Manhattan on a tourist boat, embarked on a bateau-mouche along the Seine, and visited the revolving television tower in Berlin, using the video camera to film whatever passed her by. Only the films themselves reveal that she was no "normal" tourist. "Normal" tourists try to capture a city's highlights in the most spectacular way... ..The singularity of Strbà's camerawork is most clearly evident in its superficial failings: the blurring, the off-colours, the over-exposure. The over-exposure translates the objects from their actual sense and purpose into gently shimmering ephemeral appearances. And the off-colours, wich Strbà uses for the first time in the Berlin video, manipulate the significance of that which is portrayed: Berlin, with cars weaving between anonymous violet-turquoise buildings, appears both bleached out and over controlled, at once overheated and under cooled. A searing light has eaten into these images, radiating back in test-tube colours of cloying artificially. Blinkered by its own history, it is as though these city sought to fade out the events of its past in lurid colour. A piece of architecture ticks through the images with the regularity of a watch hand. A mordant, chirping sound strays across the pictures like a complex, unearthed electronic circuit.... ..The "city videos" have soundtracks composed by Pe Lang. The significance of his electronic music, however minimal, is enormous. Starting with the quiet gliding of the boats and the silent turning of the Berlin television tower platform, the "sound" of the city, surely audible from the boat, is contrasted by the new and fascinating sound patterns of the music. The film rhythmically underpins the sweeping arcs of dynamics tension to incredibly compelling effect. In each case, the music is built up according to a modular system. a basic tone in paris, for example, the tone is generated in a resonato - is introduced into the system, broken down into different [structure bancaire] frequencies, processed and reassembled. The computer serves merely as a storage medium. Pe Lang's composition are created directly in front of the projected images: experimenting and probing until the quiet music, which Lang deliberately describes as "secondary", enters into an imponderable and mutually inspirational relationship with the images. From the text Annelies Strbà's Visionary Art by Simon Mauer in the catalogue Aya, 2003.