

Kathryn Cornelius | The Feeling of What Happens

“Time is infinite, but the things in time, the concrete bodies, are finite. They may indeed disperse into the smallest particles; but these particles, the atoms, have their determinate numbers, and the numbers of the configurations which, all of themselves, are formed out of them is also determinate. Now, however long a time may pass, according to the eternal laws governing the combinations of this eternal play of repetition, all configurations which have previously existed on this earth must yet meet, attract, repulse, kiss, and corrupt each other again...”

–Heinrich Heine

How We Learn to Love

This video piece has been created by setting up video recordings in the format of the classical triptych for both volumes of the series. In Volume I, the main actors in the performance are the artist herself and her sister, sitting on a bench by a river. The audience does not see the faces of the women, who have their backs turned to us; all we are privy to is a continuous and repetitive set of gestures and actions. The siblings' gestures oscillate on a scale of extremes, from the gentle and intimate to the coarse and aggressive. The action repeats itself and appears on each of the individual parts of the triptych in turn. There is a marked absence of narrative as well as a linear time frame; all the action takes place in unsynchronized loops. The form of the triptych can thus primarily be seen here as a frame, a structure, which has lost its essential, classical, hierarchy-building role and which now serves only as the vessel for a winding loop. Volume II uses directly the triptych format, with a similar performance in many degrees, focused on the pace of interaction instead of the proximity of the camera to the action. The eye of the viewer moves between each of the three spaces to create the feeling of the whole as the performance changes pace, forcing our attention to not take one action for granted.

The motif of the sisters is common in Renaissance painting, and was especially popular in the novels and portraiture of Victorian England when it belonged to one of the most favored of artistic genres. The expression of a specifically feminine intimacy through the medium of representation of the sisterly relationship was a certain type of ambivalent cultural 'code' of the time. On the one hand it evoked the ideals of womanly innocence, purity, and intimacy in a sisterly relationship of equals, formed through one's given position in one's family, the nature of which could also however lead to opposition, competition and rivalry. It is this ambivalence of the relationship dynamic that Cornelius explores in these two video performance volumes. It is left to us to discover where we wish to perceive and draw lines between similarity and difference, intimacy and distance, coarseness and gentleness, love and hate...

Or, Death Speaks for Us

The three selected videos from the series “Or, Death Speaks for Us” (2010) speak to us with all the more insistence by their reduced visual qualities. In all the videos the same approach has been employed:

Onto a base in the form of live pictures, the artist has projected the authorial text of the screenplay style script. Consequently, we as viewers simultaneously become the readers of a specific narrative. Another dimension of the image thus opens up to us, a dimension into which we simply find ourselves pulled and grabbed. Underneath the text the images, in a slightly slowed down motion, lightly pulsate the whole time, together with the camera in the artist's hand. We can entirely concentrate on the text in front of us, and on the basis of one picture we can generate yet more pictures in our minds, while still continuously returning to the original accompanying background image on the screen in front of us:

There is a sock discarded in front of a mirror, a wash basin, and two green apples... at first sight a banal still life, yet simultaneously a depiction of vanitas, evoking ideas of transience and absence... the absence of further images, the absence of the main protagonists... friends of the artist, the last moments of whose lives she has thus endeavored to evoke in the artwork. The still life thus becomes a portrait... the text metamorphoses into an image, and vice versa... Fiction enters this emptied and abandoned space, in the form of the 'script' of the last few moments of a life... We enter the work as viewers and readers, and our emotions essentially come to use our bodies as their own theatres.

memento mori.

Home Again, Home Again

This video series feels like something we have seen hundreds of times, and it is...almost. The artist has appropriated representations of the film industry (the popular movie trailer, famous film quotes) as raw materials to create a play of expectations with the audience...balancing two emotional planes (comedy and tragedy) in each video. With her family as stand-ins for actors, the frame of the trailer is the popular idiom, “Once you leave you can't go home again.” Here the domestic space is the backdrop for an emotional rollercoaster where almost the same clips make up the ‘story’ of the trailer and the different soundtracks are the rails of this ride. The viewer can share in the recognition of the famous movie quotes that make up the dialog. They are divorced from their original film context and mixed together so that we experience the meaning of the words differently. A line from *Taxi Driver* is in call and response to a line from *Moonstruck*...thus the family dynamic is played on a stage of fiction that seems to speak more truth than the popular distrust with which we now regard Hollywood films.

On this base of the trailer, we see how what we think we know the meaning of (the quotes), is actually the artist making us aware of how films and novels are distilled into sound bytes in popular culture...do we really know the substance of their reference? Like family stories that get passed from generation to generation, oral traditions have evolved from past centuries...where family truth was once shared in this way, popular culture has edged its way into the dominance of our individual psyches and interactions with others. It is with these quotes we see how our relationship ‘glue’ has changed....and the feelings we have about our family when we come home can at once change from happy to sad...hate and love...two degrees of emotion we feel with equal intensity.

--Vjera Borozan, 2010 (translation by Jakob Keller)