

NATALIA HUG

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Julia Scher

Warning - Always There

January 15 - February 20, 2016

Natalia Hug is very pleased to present a solo exhibition with Cologne-based American artist Julia Scher. Since the late 1980s, Scher's vast practice critically engages electronic security and surveillance issues in contemporary culture. On one hand, her work has paralleled the build up of global surveillance over the past 30 years, functioning as kind of conscience for the hysterical implementation of technologies. Scher's temporary and transitory web/installation/performance works that explore issues of power, control and seduction, can be thought of as an metaphorical scale-model of a fundamental shift in human thinking. On the other hand, Scher's ongoing preoccupation with the "aesthetic delectation" by way of mesmerizing displays of hardware and software, for example, point to essentially Warholian realm of pleasure, thriving on the manipulation of the hedonistic and fetishistic. It is at this moment, Scher successfully synthesizes a comical and corruptible relationship between 'political' and 'pleasurable' art.

The exhibition presents two of Scher's key works and stand as examples of the work's complexity and currency. The central piece of the exhibition titled "Mama Bed," (2003) stems from the 1994 series of surveillance beds. The installation, with its out-dated media technology exposed and revealed, outputs the images on the two monitors; three live cams and one playback with the explicit footage taken during 1990s incarnations of her surveillance beds. The 'DNA' of the work is revealed while the old videotapes are playing on the same monitors as live material. Here, "Mama Bed" functions as a quasi prototype for the future structures of the surveillant architectures, a term coined by the artist, letting its effects on us interactively resonate, baring premonition for a society watched and observed.

Mirroring our contemporary media-social environment, "Mama Bed" exposes all the qualities inherent to the ordinary everyday use of the bed: relaxation, sleep, desire, sexuality, but also violence, pain, suffering, and even death. All aspects of human life, which are bound to the bed, potentially play on the sheets of the empty bed's surface. However here, the paradigm change in the societal treatment of the private sphere through social media is directly evoked. Scher, in her conception of the surveillance beds, very consciously lets her audience to comprehend and navigate the ambivalent relationship between control and seduction; humiliation and gratification.

The second work in the exhibition is Scher's "Julia & Butch" (1992), a photograph from the series "Discipline Masters (DM)", first exhibited in 1994 in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. "DM", taken for video performances, captures Scher and her friends in Brooklyn acting various scenarios in bondage gear.

Julia Scher (b.1954 Hollywood, CA, USA) exhibited worldwide in institutions and galleries including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Harvard University, Cambridge, Fri-Art Centre d'Art Contemporain Kunsthalle, Fribourg, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis, The Wexner Center, Columbus, Massimo De Carlo, Milan, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Pat Hearn, New York, Esther Schipper, Berlin. In March 2016, Scher will be part of "Film As Place", a group exhibition in San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. She is the recipient of many grants and fellowships including a Bunting Institute Fellowship for Surveillance Studies at Harvard University, 1996-1997. The artist has taught and lectured at a number of institutions including Harvard University, Princeton University and Rutgers University. Since 2006, Scher is a Professor of Multimedia and Performance in Kunsthochschule für Medien, Cologne.