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GRETCHEN BENDER

Total Recall

18. April 2015 – 31. May 2015

Fullscreen

The title of Gretchen Bender's multi-channel video work Total Recall is immediately suggestive of Paul Verhoeven's Blockbuster movie of the same name, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's science-fiction tale about memory and technology "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" from 1966. It is, however, a fittingly inverted pre-emptive borrowing by Bender, used in 1987 for the first exhibition of the work at The Kitchen in New York, three years before the movie was released in 1990. The Schinkel Pavillon presents the monumental work by American artist Bender (1951-2004) in Berlin for the first time.

Bender had strong connections to the Pictures Generation artists, but in her work made use of a form of free-flowing dislocation of images and text, regulating flows of data in a way that anticipated a digital approach much more than one of Appropriation. Her work has only recently been re-evaluated in light of a recognition of her pioneering role. The exhibition allows a unique visual channel into the radical transitions of the 1980s, which – as in Bender's work – become apparent as the prelude of the coming media revolution of the digital.

Total Recall assembles twenty-four stacked TV monitors and three projection screens that blast out an eighteen-minute performance of moving images. Footage sourced from television and movies is edited to a rapid beat alongside a montage of TV commercials for consumer recording devices, played forward, in reverse and in slow motion, in which General Electric machines are presented to be at the heart of feigned familial intimacy. Abstract computer graphics – state-of-the-art programming for the time – pulsate through the installation. Animated and morphing corporate logos, movie titles in all caps and Helvetica font, and the black void of intermittently inactive displays form the body of what Bender described as "electronic theatre." For the electronic soundtrack of Total Recall Bender commissioned the New York-based musician Stuart Argabright. The computer graphics were programmed in collaboration with Amber Denker, who had also co-designed the revolutionary digital animations for "Music Non Stop" by Kraftwerk.

Bender often adopted titles of upcoming movies in her work: in Total Recall, THE SHINING, CAN- DYLAND, FULL METAL JACKET, NO END, TEEN WOLF 2 – all of which scheduled for release in 1987 – flash across the screens in white lettering. Bender was not trying to nostalgically reference mainstream entertainment. Rather, she was interested in the rapid fire of anticipation, predetermination, release, and sedimentation of mass media products, of the industry (i.e. Hollywood), the network (i.e. TV), of the seamless politics of entertainment and a corporate logic of instrumentalised desire. Bender used and manipulated some of the first computer animated corporate logos that had been produced for GE, CBS, NBC, or the rotating globe of AT&T.

Bender was born in 1951 in Seaford, Delaware, USA. She moved to New York's East Village in 1978 and befriended artists such as Robert Longo, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman. Bender started using television imagery in her work in 1982 and taught herself to edit video. She consequently started collecting and using the most advanced video and digital technology available to her. Although Bender was very early in her use of TV footage and digital animation, she is only recently being recognised for her pioneering role.

**Text: Eva Wilson**

***Total Recall* courtesy of the estate of Gretchen Bender**

**Photos: Gretchen Bender**

**Total Recall**

**Installation shots Schinkel Pavillon (Prinzessinnenpalais), Berlin 2015. Courtesy of the Estate of Gretchen Bender.**

**Photo: Andreas Rossetti**