

The Swedish artist Nathalie Djurberg (*1978) is known above all for her animated films, which seem sweet and innocuous only at a first glance. In her art, Djurberg treats themes such as obsession, power, pleasure, desire, and violence. Her first solo exhibition at a German institution presents her most recent work. Just as already in the case of her contribution to the 53rd Venice Biennial in 2009, with *Snakes knows it's Yoga* (2010) Nathalie Djurberg also enters into the exhibition space and, in addition to two films, augments her work with a sculptural ensemble. On more than forty wooden pedestals beneath Plexiglas hoods, we encounter both a multitude of clay figures bathed in variously-colored light and the masterfully inventive music of Hans Berg, which comes from one of the films.

On a turquoise stage, a frog stretches out its legs, and a naked woman directs her gaze upwards. She plays with her vulva, scratches herself with her index finger, smells it, then wipes it on her thigh. She notices the frog at her feet, catches it, and licks it for the first time while it is still on the floor. Raised up, the frog proceeds to crawl upon her body, between her buttocks and breasts; it bites and licks them. For her part, the woman enters more and more into a state of ecstasy, becomes dazed and torpid, as is shown by the background. It turns darker and darker, finally black; colorful rings appear. Merriment and alienation alternate in the face of the protagonist; the frog becomes larger, more unruly, then smaller once again. It tries to escape while the woman lies upon the floor, lost in thought. But she holds onto him tightly with a broad grin.

A naked man whose ludicrously long, black hair plays about his scrawny body sits with drawn-up legs and closed eyes. At first he does not allow himself to be distracted by an approaching snake, which coils around him in a manner that is almost already tender. He opens his eyes. A mistake? Soon after their gazes have met, the snake hypnotizes its victim. With no will of its own, his body achieves extreme contortions, then returns to the lotus position. The man meditates but is hypnotized anew, falls upon the floor, recognizes his perilous situation. Appearing in written form are »You might as well be dead already« and »Snakes knows it's Yoga.« While the snake rips the man into pieces, a smile plays across his face.

The events of the two films serve as contentual brackets for *Snake knows it's Yoga*. They bring to expression nothing other than a form of enlightenment, the attainment of another state of consciousness, of intoxication and ecstasy—whether through meditation and yoga or a psychedelic substance. A vivid visual element is Djurberg's use of colored neon tubes whose light is overpoweringly beautiful, subtly blended, and variously nuanced. The clay figures stand in stark formal discrepancy to this sublime aspect. They appear coarse and gruff, testify to having been molded in great haste. No value is attached to perfect, smooth surfaces, just as little as to correct

spelling in the constantly recurrent writing in the films. Hence there is a grammatical mistake in the title of this exhibition. Whether in the medium of film or sculpture, Nathalie Djurberg wants simply to tell her stories quickly.

In the case of the cast of characters in *Snakes knows it's Yoga* consisting of ascetics, shamans, mystics such as dervishes and fakirs, yogis and holy monks, it is a story about the journey to inner peace and knowledge, one which begins in pain. The traditional practice of yoga aims at a liberation from all bodily aspects and the attainment of enlightenment. Pain and suffering, as well as the fear of death, are constants in the creative production of Nathalie Djurberg and lead to far more visual inventions than just those described here. The two themes of enlightenment and pain undergo an aesthetic transformation which both contains the resonance of something dirty and impure and imbues the depiction with an aspect of grotesqueness. It is not least of all a somewhat exotistical exaggeration of the individual figures which brings black humor to this work, just as with many others by Djurberg. Is this humor from time to time perhaps even somewhat malicious?

Since 2004 Hans Berg and Nathalie Djurberg have been working together in Berlin. The Swedish musician and producer of techno and electronica is self-taught and is not tied to any specific sound or style. On the contrary, a broad spectrum of alternative music influences his own compositions, which he often performs live in front of an audience. With Nathalie Djurberg in 2007, he accompanied one of her films live at the Performa 07 in New York. Hans Berg is also giving a concert at the kestnergesellschaft.

Djurberg and Berg have had solo exhibitions at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Prada Foundation in Milan (2008), the Kunsthalle Wien (2007), and the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2009). Their works are included in the collections of such institutions as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, as well as the Sprengel Museum in Hanover. In 2009, Nathalie Djurberg won the Silver Lion of the 53rd Venice Biennial.

The exhibition *Snake knows it's Yoga* will be presented during the summer of 2011 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and subsequently at the Kunstforeningen GL STRAND in Copenhagen. A jointly published catalogue in English and German appears in October and includes many photographs of the installation by Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg.

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