

# Margaret Raspé

## Automatik

Margaret Raspé  
*Automatik*  
22.7.–17.9.2023

Opening: Friday, 21 July 2023, 7 pm  
Press meeting: Thursday, 20 July 2023, 11 am

### Press release

The exhibition *Automatik* is a comprehensive presentation of works by the artist Margaret Raspé. Shown in cooperation with the Haus am Waldsee in Berlin, the exhibition elucidates the density and the singularity of Raspé's artistic production over the past 50 years. The artist's primary focus is on the balancing of various processes of perception and observation, which she explores via such diverse media as film, video, drawing, painting, performance, installation, audio, text, and photography. Other central themes in her practice are bodywork, healing work, and concrete poetry, along with her approach to civilisational critique and a continuous engagement with nature and the landscape, as manifested as well in the regular panel discussions and exhibitions she initiated in her own garden (*Versuchsstationen* (Testing Stations), 1985–93).

In 1971, Margaret Raspé devised the camera helmet in order to film her daily household activities, while also investigating processes of action. As a single mother, she was confronted with repetitive, mechanical housework, and realised that this automatism inevitably lead toward a noticeable perceptual dulling. With the help of a Super 8 camera mounted on a construction worker's helmet, she was able to film in real time, drawing attention to details and minimal displacements. This allowed Raspé to establish a centralised perspective of her activities, and to abolish the cinematic separation of subject and object (she was simultaneously the eye and the tripod) while linking together manual and mental labour.

Washing the dishes, making whipped cream, baking cakes: during all of these putatively banal activities, materials are transformed, and one thing must be destroyed before another is created. In the film *Der Sadist schlägt das eindeutig Unschuldige* (The sadist whips the obviously innocent; 1971), the whipping of cream into butter is displayed as an aggressive process of transformation, while in *Oh Tod, wie nahrhaft bist du* (Oh death, how nourishing you are; 1972–73), the slaughtering of a chicken appears as a necessary – even life-sustaining – act, and a metaphor for the rupturing of entrenched gender roles. In an interview Raspé herself commented: "When I killed the chicken, I also killed an idea of myself: You stupid chicken. Never again would I be a chicken!" Other films from the series heighten our awareness of the poetic moments of daily work, when the dishes are passed rhythmically through sudsy water in *Alle Tage wieder – let them swing* (All days again – Let Them Swing; 1974), or plates and cups appear briefly as sculpture while drying (*Sekundenplastiken* (Sculptures for seconds), 1974).

Margaret Raspé's helmet camera films illuminate women's undervalued and unpaid domestic work in a male-dominated environment, but also criticise commodity consumption under capitalism. Raspé activates knowledge about the conditioning that has been inscribed onto the body. Related to this context is her interest in the mental processes of trance and ritual structures, which she explores in her documentary film *Anastenária – Das Fest der Feuerläufer von Lagadás* (Anastenária – the festival of the fire walkers of Lagadás; 1978–85). At the same time, her works can be understood as experimental arrangements through which she investigates the automatism involved in work processes and states of unconscious activity. On a daily basis, for example,

Raspé produced thousands of automatic drawings, and began using the camera helmet again in the early 1980s to make direct and uncut film footage of herself engaged in the unconscious process of painting (*Gelb, Rot und Blau entgegen* (Against yellow, red, and blue; 1983).

In her public performance as well, Margaret Raspé is interested in the incalculable physical challenges. In *Blindschnitt* (Blind cut; 1987), the artist pushed a lawnmower while being blindfolded and attempting to mow a meander into the lawn, an attempt that fails since the blindfold interferes with her control of right angles, so that the lines overlap randomly. This already marks a transition toward works that address the link between art and ecology. As early as the 1970s, she was preoccupied with the relationship between nature and technology; her conception of ecology however consciously incorporates technological apparatuses rather than excluding them, as for example in the video-spatial sculpture *Videomiel* (1990), in which the screens of portable televisions are covered with honeycombs – a reference to the analogy between honeycombs and the dot grid of video image resolution and an attempt to position culture and nature in a symbiotic, mutually nourishing and (re)giving relationship.

Raspé's biopolitical engagement is particularly evident in her works for outdoor space and landscape. Here as well, technical and natural elements are combined, and ephemeral materials such as raw wool and paper mâché are recycled and reshaped – a sustainable practice that she pursued from the very beginning. In 1990, the artist called attention to the colossal pollution and exploitation of water as a resource by immersing herself in a river in the Polish city of Łódź that had been contaminated by paints and varnishes. Her white shirt was heavily soiled, and her attempt to continue breathing by singing overtones ultimately failed due to the corrosive chemicals in the water. This self-experiment is probably her most radical performance work to make clear that water is no longer water, but instead a contemporary emblem of an exploited, the human body endangering nature.

**Margaret Raspé** (\*1933, Breslau) studied painting and fashion from 1954 until 1957 at the Munich Art Academy and the University of the Arts in Berlin. In the early 1970s, she resumed her activities as an artist with the invention of the camera helmet, producing the early experimental films. Her first public installations date from the early 1980s, when she also began organising exhibitions in the garden of her house, located at Rhumeweg 26 in Berlin Zehlendorf (until 1993). Her house became a forum for discussion where artists, theoreticians, authors and activists met, in particular from the Vienna Actionist movement, the Vienna Group (among them Günter Brus, Peter Kubelka, Hermann Nitsch, Oswald Wiener, and Gerhard Rühm), and the Berlin Fluxus scene (Joe Jones, Joël Fischer, Joan Jonas, Ann Noël, and Emmett Williams). In 1985, Raspé began teaching bodywork (concentration and movement); yoga has accompanied her artistic practice continuously. To date, Margaret Raspé's works have been exhibited only rarely in Germany, although her films attracted international attention already early on, receiving screenings at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City and the Hayward Gallery in London, among others. Her cinematic works are represented in the collections of the London Filmmakers' Coop and the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin.

*Automatik* is a cooperation with the Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, for which the exhibition was conceived together with Margaret Raspé and presented initially from 3 February until 29 May 2023.

## Programme

Fri, 21.7.2023, 6 pm

Preview

*Kondensation*, Performance, 1984/2023

The performance will take place once during the preview.

The number of participants is limited.

Fri, 8.9.2023, 7 pm  
*Anasténaria – Das Fest der Feuerläufer von Lagadás, 1978-85*  
Film Screening & Conversation  
In cooperation with Kinemathek Karlsruhe  
Venue: Kinemathek, Kaiserpassage 6

Sat, 9.9.2023, 7 pm  
Lecture & Book Launch  
of the Publication on the exhibition *Automatik*, Haus am Waldsee, Berlin

Curator's Tour  
Wed, 26.7.2023, 6 pm

Guided Tours  
Wed, 16.8.2023, 6 pm  
Wed, 6.9.2023, 6 pm

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