

Prague-based artist Bela Kolarova (1923-2010) began experimenting with photographic techniques in the early 1960s, creating photograms and X-ray photographs that continued the Bauhaus tradition of photography as an abstract medium. Thus, for a series of photograms she called vegetages, she produced miniature “artificial negatives” by pressing natural materials into soft paraffin and using them for the exposure of the photographic paper instantaneously as “negatives”.

Despite its formal similarities with avant-garde experimentation, Kolarova’s work has only gained international attention in the last few years. The exhibition at Kölnischer Kunstverein provides a comprehensive overview of Kolarova’s oeuvre, featuring around 40 of her works, ranging from early examples such as the X-ray photographs and vegetable photograms to her more explicitly feminist works, such as drawings made using make-up, a series of assemblages of knots of hair and the very personal collages from the 1970s and 1980s. Her husband was denied permission to return home after a grant had allowed him to stay. In recent years, Kolarova’s work was featured at the documenta 12 (2007), at the Raven Row gallery in London (2010) and in solo shows at the Museum Kampa in Prague (2008) and Muzeum Umění in Olomouc (2007).

The Kölnischer Kunstverein is showing Kolarova’s works together with those of Lucie Stahl (*1977), which possess certain formal similarities despite the fact that they were produced much later and under very different conditions. Lucie Stahl uses a contemporary photographic technique for her poster-like works, arranging mundane objects such as spices, ties, women’s magazines and wheel rims on a scanner and then encases the resulting inkjet prints in polyurethane like distant objects. The works are annotated with brief text fragments in which Stahl humorously provides her subjective perspective on social and political events and on the competitiveness between artists and the almost-hysterical hype that characterises the art world. Her aphoristic commentary is reminiscent of the language of American stand-up comedy, with short anecdotes in rapid succession and witticisms, recounted as if in a soliloquy, that relate awkward or embarrassing situations, pointed observations on society and her own and others’ comments. The juxtaposition of the texts and the spontaneously reproduced iconic objects creates a tension that has a distancing effect.

Lucie Stahl lives and works in Vienna. She is represented by the Dépendance gallery in Brussels and Galerie Meyer Kainer in Vienna. Her work has been featured in solo shows at the Kunstverein Nürnberg (2009), the Dépendance gallery in Brussels (2005 and 2008), the Michael Neff gallery in Frankfurt (2007), and at the Flaca in London (2005). She has also participated in exhibitions at the Temporary Gallery Cologne (2009), the Croy Nielsen gallery in Berlin (2008), and at kjuhb in Cologne (2004). Alongside her work as an artist, Lucie Stahl also manages the Pro Choice gallery space in Vienna in conjunction with Will Benedict.

This exhibition was organised in cooperation with Stadtgalerie Schwaz. An artist's book by Lucie Stahl will be published to accompany the exhibition featuring an essay by Chris Kraus, among others.

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