

ULRIKE FESER ,Double Bind'

Preview Friday April, 28th, 2006, 6pm - 10pm

Exhibition April 29th - June 24th, 2006, Tue - Sat 11am - 6pm

New address from April 28th, 2006:

Rosa-Luxemburg-Str. 43/45

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On the curve of a road, between desert mountain and sea shore, blue triangular tin signs are stuck in the sand at the sides of the road: CHECK POINT. An improvised hut, four old oil barrels stripped yellow and blue, each decorated with three stones at its side, are blocking the road. Three figures in uniform, blurred by dusty sunlight, appear to control a passing car.

This minimalist setting is meant to give tourists in Sinai a feeling of security, assure them that they can enjoy their holiday and relax on the safari-like ride along its roads. It emphasizes, however, a double-sided fragility: that of being a tourist when war has been declared on tourism and what it stands for, and the desperate local financial dependence on tourism. Yet it might just as well have become the tourist attraction itself. Such abortive gestures interest Ulrike Feser in her new series of photographs, titled "Double Bind".

In another panoramic image from the series, the dramatic landscape of the "Blue Hole" bay, an even more hallucinatory checkpoint can be traced in the sand. It is surrounded by camels and a red All Terrain Vehicle. In Feser's image the bay, a famous diving site from which many adventurous divers never returned alive, is emptied of its function as a beach. The picture transforms the few towel-covered tourists coming out of the water, into biblical figures in an arrangement reminiscent of 19th century paintings of the Orient, or a set in a 1950's Cecil B. DeMille Hollywood production. Even the small red truck, here becomes an ageless creature. Her images speak the historical language of landscape, an inevitable projection of culture upon nature.

But Feser's image making is a process of being present yet keeping a distance. It is a multiple distance, a physical one - between the photographer and her objects, and a contextual one - gained in the process of representation: She is printing a detail in large format on paper. This methodological reference to painting objects again an idea of authenticity - this time the immediate "faithfulness" of the documentary. Paradoxically this distance refers to the presence of the artist.

Another monochrome image shows Bedouin carpets covering the sand. Its title turns a famous slogan from 1968 upside down: "Under the beach lies the pavement"*. The desire to see the desert as a space of timeless authenticity - culture-free, sign-free and pure - collapses in the very act of producing a photograph. The desert is a beach and a battlefield, it is an ideological space, it is a "mediascape".

In Feser's installation one singular human appearance takes place. A four-minute video concentrates the gaze on a whirling dervish. What we see is a "folklore" performance common in the Sinai hotels. The film is projected in slow-motion; it is focused on the performer's face as his spin accelerates. The original music begins slowed down, gradually picking up speed towards the ecstatic end of his turning when his gaze shifts from inner concentration to seek the audience's eyes. The piece complements the unseen figure of the artist: A tourist swaying between resentment toward her being a tourist, and her fascination for the unfamiliar, a yearning to overcome borders and boundaries, and a desire to intervene.

The eyes of the photographer are doomed to desire. Moreover, this desire is not disconnected from a concrete political reality of conflict and neo-colonialism.

Tal Sternkast

* taken from Tom Holert, *Mehr von der Welt* in Jungle World nr 19/2002