

Press Release

Ulla von Brandenburg

Shadows under water

May 14th - July 13th, 2025

Barakat Contemporary presents *Shadows under water* (May 14th - July 13th), the first-ever solo exhibition of works by German artist Ulla von Brandenburg to come to Korea. Von Brandenburg studied stage design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe and fine art at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg. Now based in Paris, her active ongoing practice employs the approaches and methodologies of theater, stage, and performance art to address various cultural and social issues that have emerged at different historical moments, exploring ways in which specific narratives, rituals, and symbols of the past have come to shape contemporary society. Drawing inspiration from classical literature, expressionist theater, and pre-Freudian psychoanalysis, von Brandenburg works with recurring themes and imagery across a wide range of media that spans performance, theater, video, two-dimensional works, painting, fabric, installation, sculpture, and stage design.

Shadows under water consists of works by the artist that directly explore the show's central themes—water and shadow—with great depth. Evoking the relationship between the fluid, transparent nature of water and the shadows cast beneath its surface, the exhibition title itself asks: how do we ourselves reflect upon reality and ultimately produce images that may be distorted? Here, water functions not just as a straightforwardly material entity but through its metaphorical properties, serving as a key medium that symbolizes transformation and transmutation, as well as psychological depth. In setting out to explore this hidden realm of the unconscious, tracing this boundary between the watery depths and the real world, Von Brandenburg prompts the viewer to embark upon an inward exploration of their own, embracing yet another mysterious world hidden under the surface.

Von Brandenburg's new cyanotype series—*Dress, Ribbon; Shirt, Skirt, Blocks; Sticks, Fishtrap, Moon; Cloth, Ribbon, Boxes; and Tambourin, Cloth, Thread* (2025)—was created using the blueprint printing technique, which captures images through the chemical reaction and sunlight. Rather than fixing static forms in place, these images capture fleeting moments of flow. What results is a surreal atmosphere: shadows of objects cast against a deep Prussian blue background; silhouettes suspended in light as though buoyed in water.

Another series of two-dimensional works by von Brandenburg, *Chlorine* (2020), employs a photographic process involving chlorine. Various objects and human bodies are arranged beneath cotton fabric, which is then folded or creased, and chlorine compounds are sprayed over the arrangement to leave behind faint impressions of the folds and object contours. The resulting silhouettes function as traces of the world behind the curtain, interacting with the actual objects placed nearby to form a kind of threshold between the world of the real and that of the invisible. These scenes invite the viewer to imagine the possibility of another dimension of being, moving between abstraction and representation while encouraging open interpretation. Seemingly abstract paintings, these works may at first appear to follow the aesthetics of modernist formalism; upon further consideration, however, we see that they carry a critical dimension, probing the boundary between reality and representation even as they draw the viewer into forming a participatory sense of self within the world of each piece. Indeed, both the cyanotype and chlorine series use the shadows and silhouettes of everyday objects and human bodies to symbolically traverse the border between the real and what lies beyond, expanding the viewer's perception and experience.

Installed like a soft, architectural maze, a blue curtain envelops the basement white cube space, dissolving the boundary inside and outside, defamiliarizing our perception of the very place in which we stand. Made from materials repurposed from the artist's previous exhibitions, the curtain's worn and faded surface bears the well-preserved traces of past times and spaces. The overlapping temporality of these objects and curtains—elements that recur throughout von Brandenburg's work—allude to the artist's cyclical worldview, in which nothing has a clear beginning or end.

Projected onto this maze of blue curtains, the five-channel video *Personne ne peint le milieu* (2019), blurs the boundary between reality and dream. The viewer, observing the drifting objects within the video as they wander through the billowing blue labyrinth, undergoes a psychological and sensory experience akin to traveling through one's unconscious. In French, the term "milieu" typically refers to a center, environment, or social context; in von Brandenburg's video, however, "milieu" signifies a space in the middle, or in-between—a fluid state that resists fixing, remaining in a state of constant flux. The artist fixes her own gaze on this in-between space, unnoticed by everyone else.

Personne ne peint le milieu was created at a residency in Finistère, a region located at the westernmost tip of Brittany, France. Submerging different objects found in the area, the artist filmed them underwater. Projected onto the supple blue fabric, the video comprises scenes of a fan, rope, mirror, red ribbon, cloth, a book about revolution, a crumpled shirt, netting, red Mary Jane shoes, and even a crystal ball, all slowly descending into the quiet depths. At times, creased and faded fabric fills the frame; at others, the screen flickers into a momentary blackout. Through these encounters between object and water, we are offered a poetic depiction of the drift and dissolution that make up existence itself. In the artist's own words: "water is an image of the unconscious." The performance of these submerged objects, then, in which the wreckage of memory and sensation float so freely, resembles the seabed of the

unconscious. Adrift in the quiet depths, these objects appear infinitely fragile and tender, their very existence at risk of dissolving. Eventually, the camera that has been watching *Personne ne peint le milieu* closes its eye. No beginning, no end—and then the black screen.

In his book *Water and Dreams*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard defines water as a vital medium for dreams and the imagination, linking its depth and fluidity to the inner world of the human psyche. Bachelard offers insight into how water—which is no mere natural element but rather the source of all life and creation—transcends darkness and the unconscious to summon new beginnings and possibilities. To him, water possesses a dynamic force that enables transformation and creation; within its flow, new worlds are generated, the night (unconscious) itself is dissolved, and the necessary life force is produced to render boundless leaps forward possible.¹ In von Brandenburg's video, water—much like the “deep and deeper depths” described by Bachelard—becomes a symbol of the moment of creative transformation, traversing the boundaries between reality and the unconscious, consciousness and dream, the self and the outside world. And the objects that undergo their own underwater transformations become—much like the single drop of water that gives life to a leap forward—guides the viewer toward a recognition of their own psychological metamorphosis and creative energy.

Shadows under water is an exhibition of dreams that flow with and like the flow of water. Water, transparent and fluid, and the forms cast upon it set us adrift among questions of perception and distortion, of hidden depths; as we trace the boundaries of reality and fantasy, delve into times past and present, and trace the paths of presence and absence, we come face to face with our inner selves. As this journey unfolds—across underwater footage spooling between soft curtains and two-dimensional images alike—objects quietly continue to sink, the light caressing their lingering traces. Disappearance and persistence, flow and stillness intersect in a kind of rhythm, and somehow, suddenly, the viewer finds themselves standing at the very center of all these boundaries. Water blurs every line, reawakening every sense. A single wave, this exhibition surges over—and into—us.

This place is no center, but a *milieu* in constant flux—and here, at the chink in the boundary where flow and sensation meet, we discover ourselves anew.

¹ “At least as far as my reverie is concerned, what I find in water is not infinity, but depth.” “To create a world and dissolve the night, all it takes is a single powerful drop of water. Water, when set into motion, becomes a seed. It breathes life into boundless leaps forward.” —Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams* (2020), translated by Kim Byung-wook, Ihaksa Publishing, p.18,21.

Overview of the Exhibition

1. Date

- May 14th - July 13th, 2025
- 10:00 - 18:00 | Tuesday - Sunday

2. Address

- 58-4, Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea

3. Inquiry

- contemporary@barakat.kr
- +82 2 730 1948

1. About the Artist

Ulla von Brandenburg (b. 1971)



Profile of Ulla von Brandenburg, 2025. Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.

Ulla von Brandenburg (b. 1974, Karlsruhe, Germany) studied stage design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe and fine arts at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg. Now based in Paris, she actively engages with the methodologies and approaches of theater, stage, and performance art to address cultural and social issues that have emerged at various moments in history, exploring how past narratives, rituals, and symbols have shaped contemporary society. Drawing inspiration from classical literature, Expressionist theater, and pre-Freudian psychoanalysis, von Brandenburg weaves recurring themes and imagery into a distinctive visual language that spans across diverse media including performance, theater, film, works on paper, painting, fabric, installation, sculpture, and stage design.

Her major solo exhibitions include presentations at Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg (2025), Espace Louis Vuitton Osaka (2024), Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid (2023), Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2022), Weserburg Museum of Modern Art, Bremen (2021), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2020), and Whitechapel Gallery, London (2018). Significant group exhibitions include Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015, 2017), Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2015), Performa 15, New York (2015), the 11th Lyon Biennale (2011), the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009), and Tate Modern, London (2007). Von Brandenburg was nominated for the Marcel Duchamp Prize (2016) and has received several other international awards, including the Finkenwerder Art Prize.

Her works are held in the collections of major institutions such as the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (MAM), Centre Pompidou, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Tate Modern, Kadist Foundation Paris, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP) Paris, Boros Collection Berlin, Israel Museum, Montblanc Cultural Foundation Hamburg, MAMCO Geneva, Hamburger Kunsthalle, National Gallery of Victoria Melbourne, Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Mudam Luxembourg, and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (CAAC) in Seville, Spain.

2. Selected Works



Ulla von Brandenburg, *Chlore (light grey) and Dreamcatcher*, 2020
chlorine on cotton (260 x 153 cm), canvas, wood, dimension variable.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Ulla von Brandenburg, *Dress, Ribbon*, 2025, cyanotype on paper, 159 x 121 cm
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Ulla von Brandenburg, *Personne ne peint le milieu* (1 to 5), still image, 2019

Five super 16 mm films transferred to HD video, color, silent, 7'26".

Image courtesy of the artist.

3. Installation views



Installation view of *Ulla von Brandenburg: Shadows under water*, 2025, Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea.

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary.

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