

Let's be honest. At any exhibition visit, there always lingers that embarrassing desire to know more about the person behind the work. Who is this Raphaela Vogel IRL, she who, since her first appearance at BQ Gallery three years ago, has slid through numerous institutions?

Vogelspinne (bird spider / tarantula), this sounds like a deadpan joke of 'Vogelian' self-inflatory logic. After all, it's the hairiest, biggest, most poisonous and most feared spider amongst her species. But it equally recalls the vague promise of a sombre self-portrait.

Animal mother and black widow—the spider, as an archetypal symbol of fear, has mainly negative connotations. She provides ample material for misogynist imaginations of destructive-bipolar femininity. The motif also recalls, of course, Louise Bourgeois' giant bronze sculptures into which she cast her childhood fears and manifested artistic practice as self-therapy.

Can we thus assume that Vogel, who normally stages herself as the agoraphile matriarch ruling over worlds of her own creation, wants to show us a glimpse of her vulnerable side? That she, despite misleading announcements ('Ultranaakt', Kunsthalle Basel, 2017), will strip naked after all?

Indeed, upon entering the exhibition space it feels as if one has arrived inside the interior of the artist: a labyrinthine, convoluted terrarium inhabited by Vogel's fears and desires, materialized as monstrous sculptures made from the collected remainders of 'adventure culture'. In the main room, an arachnoid techno-organism: the mutation of cool Bauhaus bits and pieces combined with a swanky HD screen. Stuck between metallic but partially hairy tentacles, the display hypnotizes the viewer with a spiraling, vortex-like maritime landscape within which the artist's solitary alter ego can be seen from bird's eye view on a rock in the surf, gently cradling an accordion in her arms. It seems as if an omnipotent female storyteller orchestrates sound, the flight of the drone and the currents of the sea all at once. Whilst the image on the screen rotates in automated circles like a psychedelic screensaver, the sound collage – an assemblage of snippets from Vogel's earlier video works – transforms into a dramatic composition with quick cuts between loss of control and self-empowerment.

After the intro, in which the sound of a crying baby hovers over Vogel's melancholic accordion, the acoustic nightmare accelerates: cathartic screams from Vogel's video 'Prokon' (2014) mix with distorted drone and high-pitched cutting sounds until the static of omnipresent technology and the hysterical expression of art school paranoia attack the main character from all sides, drag her and the melody down into chaotic noise and at last swallow her entirely.

Two unreliable advocates turn things around: First, schlager singer Milva's auto-suggestive appeal

to take courage – ‚Ich hab keine Angst‘ / I am not afraid (1981) – carries the submerged character back to a calmer surface. Then enters Edith Clever, the Grande Dame of monologue, enacting several roles from Heinrich von Kleist’s drama ‘Prince of Homburg’ which, due to its fear-of-death scene, was long held to be unstageable. As Princess Nathalie, Clever dismisses the feeling of fear as ‘all in all unheroic’ and calls for composure. The sea has settled but collapse is still in the air, for example when Milva’s live recording culminates in an expressive scream of fear, just as if the ‘real’ person behind the artist emerged on stage. The final passage consists of improvised piano played by the artist, somewhere between free jazz, elevator music, cunning Helge Schneider dilettantism and a downbeat-stretched tick-tock.

Alarming baby screams and the ticking of the biological clock become the soundtrack of Vogel’s claustrophobic psychological land art which takes a quite unabashed look back, all the way to the beginnings at the Nuremberg Art Academy.

At the same time, Vogel’s artistic soul-(s)trip, in which the expiration date of career and body lingers as a dark foreboding, carries a strange aftertaste, reads somehow hubristic... The moment of hubris is a recurring motif in Vogel’s oeuvre; a strategy for critically questioning one’s own artistic creation, with the artist and her body as center and point of departure.

Arachne, a skilled weaver, challenged Athena in the arts and was turned into a spider as punishment for her haughtiness.

Similarly, Vogel let’s her own narrative strands wind up again and again: the martial volume of sound and sculptures formulates a loud, fast and somewhat snotty gesture of spatial occupation, pitting the confession of being afraid against the act of exhibiting as territorial practice. And in the central sound collage, it is the merciless recycling of her own video works, alongside the mind-numbing duration of the aimless piano improvisation, that humorously plays out as a circuit of self-reference. With this increasing depletion of meaning, Vogel violently shakes the artistic self-understanding that often remains uninterrogated.

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