

PHOTOGENIC DRAWINGS - A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST BERIT SCHNEIDEREIT

Berit Schneiderreit was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1988 and studied at the Kun-stakademie Düsseldorf until 2017. A master student of Andreas Gursky, she lives and works as a visual artist in Düsseldorf. In January 2018 we visited her in her stu-dio.

When did you start working as an artist and why?

That is difficult to say. When does one become an artist? I had already decided I wanted to formulate something before I started studying. Finding myself, that is to say developing my own artistic language, was a process. For the first few years, I studied in a sculpture class and so I was taught to look at my work from a different perspective. Amidst the work of other artists, I constantly had to challenge my prefer-ence for the medium of photography, for working with light-sensitive materials. This discourse was very important for me and for what I am doing today.

How did you get to your current artistic practice?

Drawing, three-dimensional work and photography were part of my artistic language from early on. During a year abroad, I discovered the darkroom for myself. The first pictures that emerged out of there were photograms of my hand, and later of fabrics. When I started studying at the academy, this was my starting point and a technique that is still, whether directly or indirectly, an integral part of my work.

Who or what influenced you?

That is not easy to narrow down. The first photographic works, such as Nicéphore Niépce's View from the Window at Le Gras or the photogenic drawings by William Henry Fox Talbot, are important reference points for me, as are the works of the Bauhaus movement, for example the Light-Space Modulator by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. One of my favorite places in Düsseldorf is the American Hall in the K20. Seeing the works of Ellsworth Kelly and Ad Reinhardt is impressive. In 2010 I was able to see the black paintings, his final pictures, at the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop. This exhibition definitely left its mark. But frequently buildings or gardens do too, as part of my work is created outside the studio. I am very interested in specific places that play or have played a special role within the urban space.

You graduated in 2017 in Andreas Gursky's class at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. To what extent has this made an impact on your work?

The shifting focus between proximity and distance, tiny details and the big picture still fascinates me both in terms of content and form. At first glance, there may not be any direct references in my work, but there are definitely similarities in the approach. Ul-timately, his works are also part of my visual memory and had already previously made an impact on me.

What is your art concerned with? What do you want to express?

My work consists of different techniques and strategies. They share a desire to cap-ture. An analysis of what visual space and real space communicate. To this end, I show details, peripheral spaces, which develop a special power when taken out of their context and through my interventions. In the execution, the spaces are more imaginary than real, and sometimes find themselves completely abstracted in the pictures. The interaction between nature and architecture is repeatedly discussed. It is playing with proximity and distance, reality and suggestion. Transferring the image into another medium, from the positive to the negative and back, leaves traces and mistakes that demand an attentive gaze. This process leads to a further distancing and abstraction. In the context of an exhibition, the works function as windows that expand real space into a parallel world.

Which techniques and materials do you prefer?

I like to jump between techniques. Analog and digital photography, experimental techniques like the photogram. For my work, hybrid forms also emerge from these various stages of photographic history. I try to be as free as possible and unbiased towards individual techniques in order to find a suitable form for my work. I am not dogmatic in this respect. The medium of photography has in its development spawned many different ways of producing images which I can use for myself. Part of this process is certainly chance. Working in the darkroom gives me plenty of room for experimentation. My favorite material and starting point of all these techniques is therefore light.

Is there a particular work in which you have invested a lot of energy and care?

No, I do not think so. It may be that some work is more complicated to execute and therefore takes more time, but initially I approach all my work with the same amount of energy and feeling.

If a child asked you what you do artistically, what would you say?

Shadow drawings.

That's interesting, because you don't draw at all!

I'm speaking of drawing more in a metaphorical sense. The immediacy of my expres-sion is an equally integral part of the photogram. In addition, of course, there is the fact that these works are hardly reproducible. Talbot used the term "photogenic draw-ing" for his early works, which I find apt.

Do you collect works by other artists?

Perhaps you can't quite call it collecting yet, but I have some works by artist friends like Vivian Greven, Laura Sachs or Sebastian Wickeroth, which I really treasure. In-terestingly, so far all the works are black and white!

You are young and at the beginning of your artistic career. What are your experienc-es so far in the art market and how would you advise other young artists or academy graduates?

As I only graduated from the academy in February 2017, the art market is still rela-tively unknown to me. However, I tried to see a lot during my studies to get a feel for which path might be interesting for me.

To what extent is digitization changing the art market?

I find it difficult to speak for the art market. But I realize that the way in which today art communicates digitally has a big impact on its reception. For me as an artist, on the one hand it is enriching, because I am confronted with a lot of art through media like Instagram and therefore see much more than I would be able to through exhibi-tion visits. On the other hand, it leads to a certain superficiality, which I find problem-atic. Ultimately it is always different to spatially interact with an actual piece of art. Aspects such as material and presence can only be grasped to their full extent in real space. Ultimately, this form of art reception undermines one's own sensitivity.