

Ulla von Brandenburg – Manchmal Ja, manchmal Nein

curated by Sabine Schaschl

25 February to 8 May 2016

Museum Haus Konstruktiv is dedicating a comprehensive solo exhibition to the artist Ulla von Brandenburg, who was born in Karlsruhe in 1974 and lives in Paris. Her complex and luscious oeuvre includes specifically selected references to cultural history in a broad range of media. In her black-and-white films, installations, performances, murals, and drawings, she uses a vocabulary borrowed from theater. Her works interweave reality and fiction, the audience space and the stage space. Her works' characteristic features include the use of shadows and mirrors (symbols of perception) and association-based, seemingly surreal texts, which are paired with paintings that are produced without any dependency on these texts, thus creating new contexts of meaning.

With the title "Manchmal Ja, manchmal Nein" (Sometimes Yes, Sometimes No), Ulla von Brandenburg refers to Anton Chekhov's comedy "Platonov" (1880), in which the title character, a teacher, articulates the lack of principle in the society in which he himself feels trapped. Social criticism and the desire to alter life also provide the motive for many modern art movements. Ulla von Brandenburg establishes a link with Chekhov's reduction of world affairs to the principles of rejection and acceptance – hence: "Sometimes Yes, Sometimes No".

The exhibition begins with an installation created for Museum Haus Konstruktiv from differently colored curtains. Like in theater, curtains over a wooden floor mark a transition between the real world and the stage, where play and fiction prevail and people become actors. Individual objects in the space can be read as props, and also as design elements in a space-filling painting, the shadows of which make it difficult to reliably differentiate between reality and pretense.

This artist's films are also presented in a site-specific manner, making reference to the givens of the architecture, as a space installation. They often address socio-cultural topics from various epochs, and fragmentarily show rituals and symbols that have been passed down to the present day. Ulla von Brandenburg's films are shot entirely in black and white, and deliberately avoid being directly associated with any particular temporal context. For the films' texts, which are mostly sung, the artist uses the "automatic writing" method, which was applied by the surrealists and described by André Breton as "dictation of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason".

In "Shadowplay" (2012), a life-size shadow theater is seen, with actors putting on their costumes and wigs before a performance, like in real life. They hang their clothes on coat hangers that are pulled upward on cords, and perform with silhouette figures that represent their selves. They complain about their lives as actors, with phrases like "Verbeugen bis zum Knie. Ich mocht' es nie" (Bowing to my knees. That was never for me.) or "Diese Rolle bis zum Ende" (This role to the bitter end). In their allusions, the divide between the role and the real person is blurred, whereupon the illusion reveals itself: as a simultaneous yes and no from a real/fictional existence.

In her latest works, Ulla von Brandenburg arranges objects such as dream-catchers, ribbons, rods, and ropes – along with canvases. The fabrics, previously folded and treated with light-sensitive substances,

show only the shadows of inscribed folds and resemble illusionistic drapery. They appear to cover openings – concealed portals, with which the artist entices us into a surreal world.

René Zechlin describes Ulla von Brandenburg's installations as “allegories for the theater as a symbol of life and for the complex link between theater and reality, illusion and reflection. She gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of life, without ruining the allure of her own game. With every image exposed by von Brandenburg as illusion, shadow or reflection, a new, equally complex image emerges”.

This artist's solo show, which coincides with the Sadie Murdoch exhibition and the historically oriented “DADA Differently“, spans two floors and includes works from recent years, along with presentations specially realized for this exhibition.

In the context of the exhibition, a publication is being released in cooperation with the ACCA in Melbourne, the Darling Foundry in Montreal, and The Power Plant in Toronto. In 2016, the artist shall present a solo exhibition with different works at each of these venues.

Ulla von Brandenburg has had numerous solo exhibitions, e.g.: “Sink Down Mountain, Rise Up Valley“, The Common Guild, Glasgow (2016); “Wagon Wheel“, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2015); “Inside is not Outside“, Kunstverein Hannover (2014) and the Secession, Vienna (2013); “Das Versteck des W.L. “ (The Hiding Place of W.L.), Hamburger Kunsthalle (2013); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2009); the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2008); and the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2008). She has also taken part in other major exhibitions, e.g. at the following institutions: Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2015); MAMCO, Geneva (2015); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); CAC, Vilnius (2014); the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014); the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2013); the 11th Biennale de Lyon (2011); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2011); the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); the Yokohama Triennale (2008); and Tate Modern, London (2007).



Ulla von Brandenburg, “Shadowplay”, 2012, HD video, b&w; sound, Duration 7'
Courtesy the artist, Art:Concept, Paris, Pilar Corrias, London, and Produzentengalerie Hamburg