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Grace Schwindt "Through the Front Door" at VOID Gallery, Londonderry



Grace Schwindt works in both film and performance. Her artworks explore aspects of (German) history, emphasizing social relations and ensuing questions associated with the witnessing and narrating of historical events. In the process, Schwindt's works scrutinize the idea of an inheritance of memory and its workings, e.g. the question as to whether the discussion of historical events such as the Second World War can ever be exhausted. Schwindt's approach to these themes is a unique and fascinating blend of traditions such as Brechtian Epic theatre, tableau vivant and her own artistic

sensibilities, which range from historical and sociological detail to the use and meanings of space, bodies, objects and costume.

The exhibition, which is curated by Susanne Stich, shows a selection of works, including the early films *The Chair* (2008) and *Meeting Florchen Gordon* (2008). Both these works explore aspects of Schwindt's own family history in relation to the Nazi period, centering on fragmented narratives shared in casual conversation.

Schwindt's latest work, *Tenant* (2012), is also on show. This new film centres on a scripted dialogue that takes as a starting point a story about Mrs. Schumacher who was the lodger of the artist's grandfather in Berlin during the Second World War. She was a communist and helped Vladimir Lenin travel from Switzerland to Russia in 1917 after the February Revolution broke out. In the artist's own words the film "describes the routines that take place in a family home, such as eating together, doing homework or bathing. These routines are embedded into a wider historical and social context and get repeatedly interrupted, for example, by a performer falling down stairs at the very moment she reached the top. The body in my work is turned into a fragile prop and in constant danger. I wish to empty institutionalized spaces of meaning. However, this doesn't lead to neutrality, but becomes again loaded with gender, age, class and race... I generally use theatrical sets for video and performance works with minimal architectural elements and props to mark a location. I place bodies in these spaces, including my own, and use a tightly scripted choreography, in which every move relates to institutionalized systems that rely on exclusion and destruction. I investigate how social relations and understandings about oneself are formed in such systems. Interviews that I conduct with individuals often serve as a starting point for fictionalized dialogues that are then delivered by different performers. Whilst trying to represent a system, I continuously deconstruct it by using the same mechanisms that I apply to build it: bodies, movements, speech, furniture, architecture and costumes."

The exhibition also includes the new performance *Reading from a ribbon*, which, in Schwindt's own words explores the "desires and possibilities to create equality in social relations and difficulties of being heard." *Reading from a ribbon* is based on a monologue, which takes the form of a letter. The text is presented on various levels: stitched onto a ribbon that is slowly unfolding, written onto a costume, and spoken by a performer. A tight choreography allows this text to unfold over a period of 30 minutes. The piece involves four performers: a 50-year old female dancer (Jia-Yu Corti), a 70-year-old man (James King), an 11-year old girl (Chloë Bradley) and the artist herself. These different roles also represent various possibilities of social relations implied in the text. The performers appear in isolation, but through the choreography they meet at certain points in which their mutual dependency is emphasized.

Curated by Susanne Stich