

Harriet Häußler

Sinister scenes

Veronika Veit's sculptural installations »Dusche« and »Sendepause«

There are distinctive film scenes which have become indelibly imprinted on people's subconscious. Among these is the famous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's »Psycho«.<sup>1</sup> Who can forget – the woman standing under the stream of water and being attacked treacherously from behind the shower curtain? Due to the cinematic escalation, an everyday situation becomes the quintessence of a horrific experience which emotionally touches every viewer.

The first glance at the installation »Dusche« (2004, p. 53) by the Munich artist Veronika Veit falls on such an everyday shower curtain hung around a simple, tiled shower pan. At second glance, the numerous dynamic and immobile details of the artwork become apparent. There is a small stepladder next to the shower, for instance, on which are arranged a carefully folded pair of trousers and a pair of shoes. The viewer asks him or herself if the person deciding to take a shower has just divested himself of these clothes and placed them there so tidily. But where is this person? It is only when one looks closely that one sees the physical substance of the components of this installation. Trousers and shoes are by no means real garments, but are rather painted objects. By combining an apparently real, in-use shower complete with curtain and imitated pieces of clothing, Veronika Veit presents us with a complex work. The play of these elements – which part of the artwork is real? – is taken further in the projection of a looped video animation. On the ceiling, just above the shower stall, the viewer can see the animation, similar to a cartoon. The origin of these moving pictures is to be found inside the shower, on the floor of the tiled pan.

In the animation, droplet shaped objects seem to float through the blue, indefinable space. In the middle of this area, a human body moves, turning slowly on its own axis. The figure is intensely alienated due to the fact that it is shown from above and is depicted in the same blue as the surrounding area.

In the animation also, Veronika Veit plays with different levels of reality. The projected surface on the ceiling of the shower has the effect of a mirror image: If there were indeed someone having a shower, a mirror hung on the ceiling would show the same image of a human figure, and one could view the person from above, slowly moving and turning around.

The animation answers the original question of the missing figure only unsatisfactorily. Is this person, only to be seen on the video, indeed the same one whose clothes are so carefully folded in front of the shower? By also adapting the colour of the animation to the blue surroundings, the association that one is seeing a figure under water, moving and showering is strengthened. But the person shown in the video loop is as unreal as the shoes and trousers in front of the shower.

Veronika Veit's sculptures cause numerous questions pertaining to the real and the dream world to arise in the mind of the viewer. What appears to be everyday and normal at first sight, undergoes a change due to the confusing details of the sculptural shaping of a gradual change. Veit's »Dusche« leaves one with a feeling of dissociation, of illusion, even of the sinister. As in »Psycho«, where an everyday activity evolves into a murder scene, in a work of art an apparently harmless sculpture becomes an artistic work that gradually gives rise to uncertainty. Finally, nothing is what it pretended to be at first.

In another significant installation of Veronika Veit's from 2005 – »Sendepause« (p. 62) – feelings of uncertainty and threat are also evoked. Again, parallels can be found to famous images from horror films. As in the film »The Blob«,<sup>2</sup> a terrifying scene emerges from what had given the impression of everyday cosiness. In the film, an amorphous mass spreads, engulfing human beings. In »Sendepause«, an amorphous form gradually becomes a threatening element.

In Veronika Veit's installation, the gaze falls first on a sculptural, apparently commonplace object. An inviting armchair, offering promise of comfort draws the gaze with its disturbing bilious green colour. The light indentations on the seat and backrest of the piece of furniture suggest that someone had been sitting here. As in the trousers in »Dusche«, the armchair in »Sendepause« is by no means a ready-made object. Again, we are dealing with a painted sculpture. Adjacent to the armchair there is a monitor on which one can see a video loop animation. One is given the impression that the person who has just left was sitting here watching television. On the video screen a more-or-less worm-shaped but otherwise unidentifiable shape moves backward and forward in an irregular movement. The animation seems to be an abstract moving picture. Interestingly, the amorphous shape has a flower pattern in a similar shade of green as that of the armchair. This pattern is repeated in the third element of the installation »Sendepause«: From a small hinged window on the wall next to the armchair, a

shapeless mass oozes into the room. The mass with the particular green flower pattern from the television – from the video animation – threatens to burst the window catch. Is it about to take over the room completely? Did the person sitting in the armchair exit the room precipitately from fear of the ominous green threat? Is the animation a live circuit, a simultaneous transmission of the invasion of the green mass with the flowery pattern? In line with this chain of association, the title of the work, »Sendepause«, holds in itself a second meaning. It is no longer the interval between two programmes that is being indicated but rather what is often called »a deathly silence« in colloquial speech that characterizes the scene. The human fear of a non-definable but all-devouring something-or-other, known as »Blob« in the film, is decorated with flowers in this work of art. The rising terror during what is a normal everyday entertainment – watching television – thus assumes a definite shape.

Veronika Veit's installations play with such intimate motifs and scenes which are deeply anchored in the subconscious. The viewers cannot say where their associations will lead them. Will they feel as if someone is watching them when they take a shower? Or will an open window while watching television remind them of an oozing green mass? Veronika Veit has broken with trusted, comfortable patterns. The sinister has finally come home to stay in her sculptural world of images.

- 1 Alfred Hitchcock, Psycho. With Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, USA 1959.
- 2 Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr., The Blob. With Steve McQueen, Aneta Corsaut, USA, 1958.

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