

WIR TUN EINFACH, ALS OB WIR NICHT DA SIND

MARIANNE HALTER



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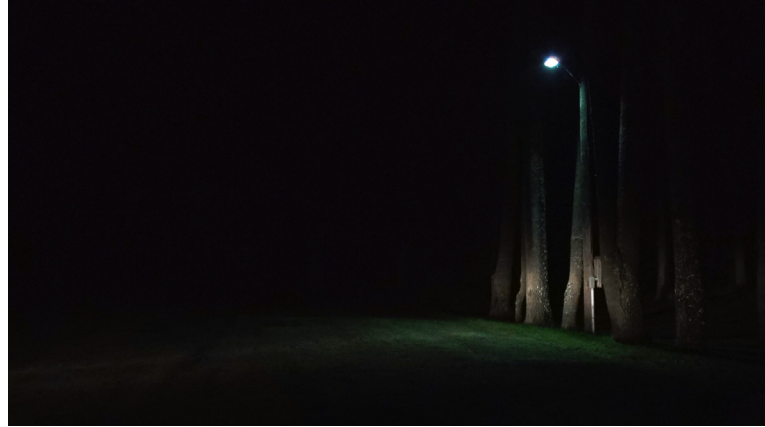
CONVERSATION WITH MARIANNE HALTER

SF: *Wir tun einfach, als ob wir nicht da sind* (eng.: *we'll just pretend that we aren't here*) – the title of your solo exhibition at **DAS ESSZIMMER** casts ashore different associations to the borders of my synapses. On one hand the somehow faint memories of children's games which would always start with the sentence *We pretend now as if...* we would play house, cops and robbers and a few others. At the same time I am wondering how someone can actually do that – *to pretend that one is not here?* As a child I would perhaps not ask this question, but now...?!

MH: I don't know either. As an adult one has to close the eyes perhaps. But I am rather interested in the idea that a statement can be as strong and true as this indecent reality, which is surrounding us every day. The enchantment of the idea of being mentally thrown out of this one and only reality, out of the everyday routine and by doing so to give up all responsibilities. When someone pretends as if, then this can be either meant in a theatrical, playful way or it is just a bluff. But making oneself invisible can also be an act of despair, tiredness, or paralysis – maybe no one does notice us. Like Strangers, who also try to pretend that they were not here.

SF: *...to make the impossible possible through thinking about it* – even and despite the indecent reality that you mention. This equally contains something poetical and an attitude similar to Don Quixot – right? And makes me think of the video installation *Hin und Zurück!* (eng.: *There and Back!*) in the back exhibition space. Therein we can see a figure with a suit appearing again and again on the alleged stage in order to receive the applause of an invisible crowd.

MH: Yes, exactly. This installation turns around doing something with dignity and sincerity; something that is obviously



Hin und zurück, Videostill, 2014 | Video, HD, loop, with sound, projection on a box, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

absurd or that can not be seen by others – additionally paired with a certain defiance and resistance, which appears in the word *einfach*/just (*wir tun einfach, als... / eng: we'll just pretend that.....*). In the video *There and Back* (2014) we are however also interested in the place that experiences a transformation through the figure's action. The concrete and visible possibilities which are inherent in a place as – like in this case – being just a parking space in the middle of nowhere.

SF: This revaluation and reinterpretation also occurs in the video *Showtime* (2015). That is waiting for the visitors after they have passed by the continuously running LED-text of *Wir tun einfach, als ob wir nicht da sind* (eng.: *we'll just pretend that we aren't here*) and after lifting a white shiny plastic curtain, which always reminds me of the butchers' plastic aprons.

In *Showtime* you let the world perish symbolically – using the example of Las Vegas. Not frantic, dramatically or with any big gestures; but silently, almost in a meditational way and relaxed. Accompanied by Mario Marchisella's music, who has melodized a poem by Rilke *Das Karussell* (eng:

The Carousel), which washes around and accompanies the downfall suitably. – Just like the musicians on the titanic.

MH: Yes, on one hand there is indeed this silence, spreading due to the cars' that glide through the flooded streets in slow motion, almost swimming through the water masses and also because it is night and there is this blackness, that swallows everything. Since I am not using the real sound that would produce a space, but instead only Mario's soundtrack accompanies the scene, everything seems oddly disconnected from reality. There is however at the same time in the same image and space a hysteria, that even in slow motions appears electrified, the overwrought world of advertisement on mega screens, which function only fragmentarily and sometimes deflate due to the tempest. So I proceeded primarily from this change of speed and from the different pace within the same image. The composition of the background music is based on the same approach.

And it was not until later that Mario proposed to take the English translation of the poem *Karussell* as the lyrics of the

Showtime, Videostill, 2015, Video, HD, 19min34, music: Mario Marchisella





Showtime, 2015, exhibition view ,Video, HD, 19min34, music: Mario Marchisella

song. But it is quiet interesting to me that you particularly remember this aspect of silence.

SF: I think this has something to do with the song and its rhythm. There is a progression, a crescendo though within the soundtrack that has an equivalent in the projected images, culminating in a more and more frantic flickering screen with distorted water fountains reminding of shot rockets. And yet it all seems so mandatory, so logical and inevitable that one can simply let it happen; without any drama or rush; just as if it all had to come this way. – Maybe this is the frequently evoked silence before the storm or just *we'll just pretend that we aren't here*.

The butchers' aprons like plastic curtains to me are – a bit contrary to the general assumed association – much more pleasant than the felt curtains that are commonly used in such video presentations.

MH: My purpose was to pick up the blending white of the room with the shiny tarps and to intentionally stage in that way the distinction, which had to be made anyhow for light-technical reasons. In this work the room should either disappear completely, black striped walls and black carpet, just like in the cinema or the exact opposite, as I attempted, this glary, science-fiction-like result, that contrasts with the night dark pictures from the light space of the video and reflects at the same time the lights and the sound at the boundaries of this room. I could have intensified this of course with a shiny floor/ceiling and a smaller room scale.

To me it is important what an installation can do with the visitors' orientation and physical sense. Therefore I also placed the bench on the wall. In this work one should immerse and forget everything, in fact exactly as you described it. The music does of course essentially contribute to the fact that one is blended in and that the sense of time shifts. The video though lasts approximately 20 minutes and the setting remains the same the whole time.

I am not interested at all in evoking primary information like floods, catastrophes, climate change, the superficial world of advertising, the consumer society etc. nor in suggesting a causality between these events. I am far more concerned with the fragility of surfaces and with the question of what happens when usual processes get out of hand or when procedures come to a standstill. In some scenes of the advertisement videos there is suddenly an almost existential emptiness and absurdity evoked, caused by the slowed down speed and the distortions. A similar process is happening when I repeat a word out loud so often until I do not understand its meaning anymore.

SF: These gentle shifts can also be experienced in your works in the back exhibition space, for example in the work with the title *Daheim ist's gut* (eng.: *There is no place like home*), from 2012. A small replication of an old television set. On its screen you mingle epigraphs and house inscriptions, that are taken out from their original context and get thus a totally different meaning – to some extent they do not seem comfortable at all or they even appear totally incomprehensible.

MH: The TV model – its design being a free and strongly simplified interpretation – is only pretending as if..., on the inside it is equipped with a digital photo frame that is normally



Daheim ist's gut, 2012, exhibition view, plywood object, digital photo frame with text animation, 16,5 x 12 x 9,5cm

used for photographs only, for example for family images. The plywood housing reminds, due to its haptic and the crafts aspect, of the handicraft workspace at home – therein I play with the charging of materials which thematise the home, the safe and sound world of the family and homeland or even the withdrawal to the private space, similarly to the collected epigraphs. However, in contrast to the epigraphs these materials allude to such concepts rather subliminally. In this context, I am especially interested in the emotional ambivalence that these texts evoke to me. Since they appear one after the other without any pause or transition, the meaning of one epigraph beats that of the next one. *Holy Saint Florian, please spare this house, set another one on fire, When the house is ready, that's when death arrives, The best thing one takes from travelling back home is the sacred skin* etc. This results to something like a miniature edition of a News Show.

SF: *The lost monument no. 1* might have had a house epigraph

too, although this custom seems to spread mainly in Germany, Switzerland and Austria and not in China, where this so called *Nagelhaus* (eng.: *Nail house*) was actually situated. As a coloured pencil drawing directly applicated on the exhibition wall, it evokes the impression of being a type of projected video image. In this case the concept of home does not exist anymore and the highway that is interrupted by the house on the drawing is in the meantime freely traversable for sure.

MH: For this work I started from this visually strong image of resistance: a seemingly totally displaced house in its location, which protrudes solitary into the landscape, penned in from a freshly tarred highway. This multi-storey house does not fit to the plain landscape without any neighbouring houses and thus seems to be exposed in a strange way.

I want to stage a series of such *nail house images* – the first one here at your exhibition space in Bonn – by



Hin und zurück (left), 2014, Video, HD, loop, with sound, projection on a box, with Mario Marchisella – From the series: *Verlorene Monumente, Nr. 1* (right), 2015, performance according to a found photo of a nail house in China, crayon drawing on exhibition wall, ca. 2 x 3m



drawing them directly onto the walls, referring to the space and the context. The fact that it reminds you of a *projected video image* has probably got something to do with the many colour nuances but also with the fine, condensed lines, which appear as if screened due to the wall's structure. From afar, the drawing seems almost to flicker and to dissolve on the margins. Therefore it is unfortunately quite difficult to photograph it. Actually it is the *wrong* technique considering the wall surface and the image size, but this contradiction provokes me and the concrete resistance, while working, forces me to spend a lot of time with this work without the drawing ever being completely finished.

SF: All 3 works in the back exhibition space are accompanied by a roaring applause in regular intervals, an applause which evokes something uprising and grave but which at the same time poses the question of what there is actually to applaud for:

MH: The distinguished applause, which can be also perceived as an increasing and decongestant noise, and the regular purposeful steps on the gravel, which also appear out of nowhere and disappear again in the end, point first and foremost to the people, and thus to me. In this way I cover with my ears the same space, in which the *Nail House*, the box and the TV model are situated. The sound does not just structure the time spent in the exhibition but also the space itself – the real and the fictional one are blended together by that means.

SF: After having watched the video *There and Back*, which is *responsible* for the applause, a visitor said that every time she hears the steps on the gravel and every time the applause came, she saw the video image again and that it was added to the other seen art works.

From the series: *Verlorene Monumente, Nr. 1*, 2015, performance according to a found photo of a nail house in China, crayon drawing on exhibition wall, ca. 2 x 3m





From the series: *Verlorene Monumente, Nr. 1*, 2015, performance according to a found photo of a nail house in China, crayon drawing on exhibition wall, ca. 2 x 3m

Footnote:

1 *Nail House* (Chinese: Pinyin: dīngzìhù) is a Chinese neologism for a building, whose owners refuse to sell their house for a new construction - mostly for bigger commercial buildings.

The term is a wordplay of the Chinese building industry.

The house is compared to a nail that is pinned on a hard piece of wood and that cannot be driven in with a hammer. The owners are sometimes colloquially called *hardheaded nails*.

Marianne Halter

1970 born in Zürich, raised in Lucerne

1991/97 Schule für Gestaltung Lucerne

2003/13 studio residences in Chicago, Paris, Johannesburg and Peterborough

Awards

- 2013 Residency Mac Dowell Colony, New Hampshire, together with Mario Marchisella
- 2011 Werkstipendium Stadt Zürich
- 2010 Swiss Art Award, Bundesamt für Kultur
- 2010 Zentralschweizer Videopreis 2010, Galerie, O.T.
- 2009 Nachfolgeprojekt Südafrika, Pro Helvetia, together with Mario Marchisella
- 2008 Atelierstipendium Johannesburg, Pro Helvetia, together with Mario Marchisella
- 2006 Videowettbewerb Dizzyland, Nordportal Baden, Publikumspreis, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2003 Atelierstipendium Paris, visarte Zentralschweiz / Atelierstipendium Chicago, city/canton of Lucerne
- 2002 Werkbeitrag from the canton of Lucerne
- 2001 Basel, project residence in the guest studio Warteck
- 1998 Stipendium Videost/Kubox, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 1996 Preis Videowerkschau CH, Lucerne, VIPER, collaboration with Susanne Hofer

Solo shows since 2002

- 2015 Bonn, **DAS ESSZIMMER** – Raum für Kunst+
Lucerne, Galerie Apropos, *Das Versprechen*
Brugg, Brutkasten, *Grenzüberschreitung*
- 2013 Zürich, Galerie Christinger De Mayo, *Wilde Versammlung*
- 2011 Lucerne, o.T. – Raum für aktuelle Kunst, *Frontierland*
- 2010 Zürich, Galerie Christinger de Mayo, *Time to choose*
Schaffhausen, Vebikus/Kammgarn, *Plaster and Building*
- 2009 Lucerne, Galerie Apropos
Durban (SA), KZNSA, *But I, I will not return*
Cape Town, blank projects, *The conductor's fear of the soloist* (collaboration with Mario Marchisella)
- 2008 Zürich, visualdrugs, *Aber ich, ich komm nicht mehr zurück*
Johannesburg, Drill Hall, *The conductor's fear of the soloist* (collaboration with Mario Marchisella)
- 2007 Zürich, Landpartie, *da gibts einen Ort*
Zürich, Kunststafette, *Gute Aussicht – Leben auf der Ueberholspur*, (collaboration with Lena Eriksson)
- 2005 Chäslager Stans, *Ich bleib zuhause*
- 2002 Bern, Stadtgalerie, *Von Vorgärten und Zapfsäulen*, (with Susanne Hofer)

Group shows since 2002 (selection)

- 2016 Johannesburg, Wits Art Museum, *When tomorrow comes*, collaboration with Mario Marchisella
Döttingen, Kulturtankstelle, *Boxenstopp*
- 2014 Zürich, Museum Bärengasse, *is ist (y)ours?*, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

Zürich, Helmhaus, *Werk- und Atelierstipendien der Stadt Zürich 2014*, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

Basel, Villa Renata, *Soap Opera Machine House*, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

London, Carroll/Fletcher projectspace, *Uncertain Identities*, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

- 2013 Mexico City, Arroniz Arte Contemporáneo, *Superstructures*
Lucerne, Kunstmuseum, *Zentralschweizer Kunstschaffen 2013*
Kriens, Kunstraum Teiggi, *Composition*

- 2012 Lucerne, Kunstmuseum, *Zentralschweizer Kunstschaffen 2012*
Zürich, Artespace, *Corpus Urbanis*
Pfäffikon, Seedamm Kulturzentrum, *Von hier nach dort*
Strobl, Deutschlandvilla, *Kult Zürich Aussersihl – das andere Gesicht*

- 2011 Bonn, **DAS ESSZIMMER**, *Kollateral / Collateral*
Zürich, Binz 39, *Die Garderobe*
Lucerne, Kunsthalle, *Connections*
Zürich, Helmhaus, *Werk und Atelierstipendien der Stadt Zürich 2011*
Genf, Espace Temporaire, *Off Spaces*
Dresden, *Ostrale*, zusammen mit Mario Marchisella
Meggen, Benzholz, Raum für zeitgenössische Kunst, *Komm tanz mit mir*
Zürich, Helmhaus, *Zwischenlager*
Biel, Centre Pasquart, Fotoforum, *Fragments – Urban Realities in South Africa*

- 2010 Lucerne, Galerie sic/ Produzentengalerie Alpinum, *Kopien und Zitate*
Basel, Messe, *Swiss Art Awards*
Johannesburg, UJ Gallery, *Ecotopian States*
Lucerne, Galerie O.T., *Screening – Videoszene Zentralschweiz*

- 2009 Durban, KZNSA, *But I, I will not return*
Zürich, Shedhalle, *Nahrung - kaleidoskopische Untersuchung eines Treibstoffs*
Genf, Piano Nobile, *F(r)ictions*

- 2008 Lucerne, Kunstmuseum, *Zentralschweizer Kunstschaffen 2008*
- 2007 Lucerne, Kunstpanorama, *Bonjour Madame Brunau*

- Zürich, Kunstszene, Gruppenkoje
Lucerne, Kunstpanorama, *Werkbeiträge Stadt/Kanton Luzern*
Baden, Videokulptur 07

- 2006 Potsdam, Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, *Heimatflimmern*, collaboration with Susanne Hofer

- 2005 Baden, Trudelhaus, *Geld*

- 2004 Illnau, Effretikon, Kunstvereine, *Videospaziergang*
Kunstmuseum Lucerne, Innerschweizer Jahresausstellung

- 2003 Hamburg, Hinterconti *each dream is an example*
Lucerne, Marinemuseum, *Für immer Krieg*, collaboration with Susanne Hofer

- 2002 Lucerne, Hotel Backpackers, *One NightStand*
Kunstmuseum Lucerne, *Zentralschweizer Jahresausstellung*

Selected broadcasts/performances since 2002

- 2015 Zürich, Videoex Special, selection of videos from the Kunstsammlung der Stadt Zürich
Schaffhausen, Kunsthalle Vebikus, *Videospecial*
- 2013 Zürich, Videowindow, OG9, *Frontierland*

- 2013 Durham (CA), Fabulous Fringe Festival, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2012 *Night Fever*, Johannesburg, Filmprogramm Goethe Institut/ Afropolis
- 2011 Berlin, Bildwechsel,
- 2008 Dresden, Schauspielhaus, Filmfest, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Hamburg, Kino Metropolis, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2007 Montreal, Maison de la Culture, Swiss-Quebec Videoprogram, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Horgen, Alte Papierfabrik, Videoprojektionen
Sils, Hotel Waldhaus/ Kunstpanorama Lucerne, with Duo Belvedere
- 2006 Baden, Schweizer Videopreis, Dizzyland, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Zürich, Theater am Neumarkt/Club Helsinki, with Duo Belvedere
- 2005 Riga, Galerie Noass, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Bern, Forum für Medien und Kunst, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Zürich, Videoex , collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Volksbühne Berlin/Nottingham, "Trampoline", collaboration with Susanne Hofer
Kurzfilmfestival Hamburg, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2004 VIPER, Basel, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
SF DRS, Sternstunden Kultur, *Aufnahmen*, collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2003 Paris, Barbara Hollstein Galerie, Diashow
- 2002 ARTE, *die Nacht*, collaboration with Susanne Hofer

Selection of projects / jobs

- 2015 Edition5, Erstfeld
- 2014 *Painting*, guest number for the Bildmagazin 957
- 2013 *Der Sowohl als auch Raum*, research project HSLU Lucerne, together with Caspar Schärer
- 2009 Videobühne for *Joburg Melting* (Konzertreihe Arts on Main, Johannesburg), with Joao Orecchia and Mario Marchisella
- 2005 *Notte di Ballo*, Videobühne for Duo Belvedere, premiere Chäslager Stans 2005
- 2004 SF DRS/ Sternstunden Kultur: editing of 4 videospots in collaboration with Susanne Hofer
- 2001 UG, LUzerner Theater, *Eine Nacht für Gefühle*, a situation for 6 actors and 1 voice-over, concept and direction, collaboration with Guido Henseler
- 2001 *M&M*, a Tonbild-concert in collaboration with the musician Marie-Cecile Reber; premiere Bellpark Museum Kriens
- 1999 stage / projections for *Beispiellose Entblössung einer Kaufhausdiebin*, Theater Freiburg i. Br., director: Ariane Gaffron
- 1999 video pieces for *Document 2*, Linda Gaudreau/Companie de Brune, Montréal, premiere Stadttheater Luzern

Works in collections

South African National Gallery IZIKO (ZA), Zürich (CH), canton of Zürich (CH), Lucerne (CH), canton of Lucerne (CH), Credit Suisse (CH), Editon 5(CH)

The acoustic intervention *Analoge Meditationen* by the actress Julie Bräuning (text / concept), which she premiered live with the musician Mario Marchisella, functioned as a complementary counterpart in the exhibition by Marianne Halter:



Hin und zurück, Videostill, 2014 | Video, HD, loop, with sound, projection on a box, collaboration with Mario Marchisella

Front side, exhibition view:

Wir tun einfach, als ob wir nicht da sind, 2010, LED marquee, 70 x 11 x 4,5 cm

Back side, exhibition view:

Hin und zurück (links), 2014, Video, HD, loop, with sound, projection on a box, collaboration with Mario Marchisella and from the series: *Verlorene Monumente*, Nr. 1 (right), 2015, performance according to a found photo of a nail house in China, crayon drawing on exhibition wall

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