

Dialogue of the cultures - Unseen things in the images of Myriam Thyes

By Dr. Vanessa Müller, in: 'k + m' art magazine, Witten, Germany, 1999

New media as far as the eye can see – art also looks for models of creating pictures by productively combining old and new techniques. But is there still the unseen, are there still images beyond the universal archive of the visual? - For the artist Myriam Thyes from Düsseldorf working with the already existing and falling back on existent upholders of civilization is not a conflict, but an artistic principle. Her adoption and contextualization of ancient symbols and forms reactivates what has always been there, translates and thus very naturally takes up the dialogue with the contemporary media.

Pictures of African plastic art floating through digitalized scenes of architecture or archaic constellations of figures in popular pathos – for Myriam Thyes these are not contradictions, but productive alliances. The artist, born in Switzerland in 1963, paints on canvas as well as on computer-screens, also video and photographs are equally entitled partners in creating images. Her art crosses borders not only concerning the materials and techniques, but also concerning cultures and their ideologically charged archives of imagery. Her works integrate into the contemporary media-world only to translate an archetypical sphere, which seems to have been present ever since as a basic potential of expression. The results of this computer-directed crossover are utopic sceneries in which the images of the present connect with the overlapping time-horizon of the mythical.

Beyond the visual surface, Thyes concentrates on laying open the culturally coded contents hiding cleverly behind the high-gloss aesthetics of generally familiar images. For example, in the series “Sarah” (1995) she reassembled 50 video-stills taken from the Schwarzenegger movie “Terminator 2”: Emotionally expressive close-ups of the female protagonist, clear cut, hit upon the dissolving body of the “Terminator”. Just as the personified evil from the cyber-lab changes its aggregate state, the film-scenes with Sarah as the Saviour of mankind change their chromaticity in an colour-scale from blue to a warm orange: a Christian metaphor of salvation as a technoid science-fiction vision.

This stressing of the constancy of culture in a sensual and sensible way can also be seen in Thyes' works on architecture. Modern sky-scrapers figure as objects of representation and built ideology, as a space reduced to geometric frames, presenting themselves to the spectator as an impenetrable envelopment. Her photographs of prominent buildings of the Paris district of “La défense” show these as a reflecting glass-façade in which she integrates fragile paintings as an confrontation of mostly African goddesses with masculine-connoted prestige architecture: archaism meets modernism.

Translation: Anja Gersdorf