

Fish Frame, Wind-Still Flowing

I. It is quiet. Voices murmur in between, as if coming from the room next door or the damp, hollow depths of a place of worship. Once, the sound of someone practicing an etude on the piano is heard. The Seven Days of the week give the videos a clear, everyday timeframe. Memories of indoor and outdoor spaces from Renata Bünter's childhood in the heart of Switzerland define the location. The few muted, memorable encounters that occur are not far from a still. More than a tableau vivant by only a nuance or two, they are at a great remove from any action – like landscape images from a close distance that nonetheless seem detached, as if seen from afar, and laced with slow movement. Only Tuesday is slightly more agitated with her older sisters repeatedly walking back and forth, preening in front of the mirror. Symbolism and imagery are weighty and meaningful when taken in isolation – a grandmother in an armchair with her rosary, a grandfather with his carabiner, stretched out on the carpet at her feet, a grandchild hopping in between; here, however, they appear gently ironic and absurd, without much ado.

II. Renata Bünter's brief filmed sequences echo her use of language in other works. She lines up words, making laconic statements that reverberate. It is more like lyrical speech that lends weight to images and allusions. A few words conjure an entire scene. The mortar between the textual building blocks seems loose. Thoughts and memories settle down in the gaps and recesses.

Each shot in these videos can therefore be interpreted as a self-sufficient sentence of a text that is in progress. The special atmosphere generated by the relationship among things is greater than the meaning of the sparse gestures. Although

the camera zooms in on different views, each take gives the impression of a static, meticulously composed long shot. We look at a room, a picture, the mountains outdoors. Pasted in, an agile fish has a frame of its own, undulating back and forth in the midst of airy space.

III. The backdrops for the shoots take their cue from the spaces of childhood; the costumes and properties are minimal but thoughtfully chosen to reflect the times. The staging goes only so far as to satisfy the lighting required for a clearly aimed camera. The simple rooms have been purpose built in keeping with the unassuming events. They are related to Renata Bünter's small drawings or sculptures, in which ordinary materials simply shaped stand both for a presence in space and for the silence that surrounds them.

Conceptual art can do without the implementation of an idea. Minimal art cultivates the economy of industrial processes. Laconic art shows an affinity with improvisation and bricolage, beginning with a story without becoming garrulous. Bünter's word-bound and sculptural works are governed by a quiet attitude of rightness that is reduced to essentials. The camera lends this attitude, this approach a longer but rigorously defined duration in meticulously staged spaces. The artificiality of the stage sets is neither concealed nor forced. Nothing hides its use as a property and yet all of the elements of a situation are realistically sketched. This generates a curious atmosphere of alienation and closeness at once, a form of artificial authenticity, showing an affinity with the scenarios produced by Jeff Wall.

IV. A static camera begins by recording the built situations, as if facing a proscenium stage. And then, as if it were a sculptural tool, it opens up spaces. The dissolves in particular reveal the space being stripped, layer by layer, to expose the substance of recollections. We are able to understand the setting of each scene and yet the place is transformed with every superimposed black-and-white afterimage of people waving to us from the top of the mountain as if they were old acquaintances. This place sheds its skin in silence and glides into the depths of years long past. Elsewhere, in contrast, sounds and noises reinforce

the tactile presence of single gestures: the pages of a book rustling when they are turned. Even the silence is almost tangible at times. Instead of a "video sculpture", one might speak of videos that are sculpturally composed, functioning as tactile entities in space.

V. In his "terrestrial" manifesto, *Où atterrir?* (2017), Bruno Latour introduces a third option as an alternative to the false globalization that is destroying all of the planet's finite resources for the sake of flagrantly enriching an exclusive financial aristocracy and the blind chauvinistic provincialism that ignores both climate change and growing social tension: the point of reference for this son of a wine merchant from Beaune is the terroir. The human need for spatial and cultural orientation, for real ground underfoot, while physical and communications mobility keep devouring more and more space, cannot be gratified by naïvely conjuring a "homeland" or "soil" that calls for "blood". Terroir stands for earth (terre), for a place in which individuals see themselves in multiple relations to one another and to all other beings and resources on the planet.

Seven Days is about the extremely direct and yet highly complex reconstruction of these multiple relations. Bünter stages the rooms and landscapes of her origins. She traces her past in the setting of mountains where a sense of security and sleeplessness follow each other with little hope of reconciliation. Terroir is no longer to be had unbroken.

VI. Unlike the language works and objects, which are largely devised and created by Bünter alone, the videos are made in collaboration with technical professionals and lay performers. The straightforward simplicity of the end product is achieved in the course of several phases of building and directing the shoot, during which the author shares her ideas. Conversation, which already played an important role in earlier work, now becomes a crucial factor of the productions. Animated debate precedes scenes without words, to which the decisiveness of awkward gestures later bears silent testimony. Smiling and waving with a touch of embarrassment does not come easily in the remake. A calm voice encourages it.

VII. Finally, on being projected, the sculpturally conceived video pieces become events in space in their own right. They are not meant to be screened in a clean white cube or a cinematic black box. Rather, they are set up in a distinctive location in the context of other sculptural or linguistic works. They may appear on the functional surfaces of a building, adding to the other layers of pictures on the walls. Bünter has already experimented with projecting stills from her videos in a gigantic camera obscura. Immobilized for a moment on photographic paper, the single excerpts of a still merge into the structure of an abstract grid. The room develops still another picture that has already been generated by actions in the rooms.

Like a recurring dream, the girl in the moonlight keeps getting up from her stool, affixes the last wooden clothespin to the large white bedsheet hung on the clothesline and then smooths it. The screen for the projection of these videos will never be permanently mounted either.

Hans Rudolf Reust