

gabrielle zimmermann (gz) – senseless activities, carried out with great diligence

In 2009, acclaimed video artist Gabrielle Zimmermann (gz) started her “series of experiments” bearing the seemingly contradictory title of “Senseless activities, carried out with great diligence”. In it, curious investigations are carried out with great scrutiny in a laboratory-like setting. Packaging materials, such as bubble wrap and sealed air cushions, are being cut, perforated, penetrated, destroyed, and manipulated – air is extracted and liquids are being injected in an abundance of varied procedures and mannerisms, using scalpels, tongs or needles.

A distinct formal aesthetic inherently marks the emerging composition. There is a contrasting tension between the translucent surface texture of the plastic on one side, with its “ethereal” delicacy, and the almost disquieting metallic surgical instruments on the other. And much like the pliant material of the plastic, the very fabric of time is also stretched, dragged out and inflated. Like, for example, in scene No 6b of these “investigations”, in which the seemingly ceaseless lines of bubbles in a single length of bubble wrap are meticulously squashed one by one with a finger. The real time recording of this endeavour clocks in at close to one hour, but has been shortened through time-lapse crossfades. The “music” of popping plastic bubbles and the dry crinkle of the plastic wrap accompany and accentuate this “ballet” of finger and membrane motion.

While the title may convince the ingenuous spectator of this enterprise's light-hearted and “senseless” nature, in fact, that is not the case. Rather, it contains a multitude of intellectual approaches, capable of inciting a widely diverse discourse among its recipients: On an environmental or anti-consumerism level, one can see an inquiry about the generation of “dissipative waste” that consists merely of a by-product, the packaging of consumed goods. Or one could ask about the anachronism of certain depicted data media, virtually showcasing the end of an epoch of “analogue data”¹. But there are also associations with the complex of meditative practices and approaches, like in Buddhism, and especially Zen. Or one could draw on a comparison to Camus' “Myth of Sisyphus”², and the associated questions of absurdity and existence.

This series of works, which should always be understood and shown in this function, tackles the large questions for meaning in life, but in a very minimal yet humorous way. So, what is, after all, meaningful? What is truly senseless? These questions are raised casually and never devoid of irony, and leave plenty of space for any individual line of thoughts the beholder may have. When people are made to smirk or to sceptically shake their heads, or if maybe even a train of thoughts is set in motion and followed through, the cause of this can by its very definition not be seen as senseless any more. Even discarded packaging, “garbage, serving absolutely no purpose”, receives a new application, is given some sense.

Gabrielle Zimmermann (gz) has graduated in literary studies and art history (M.A. with Tilman Osterwold and Beat Wyss). Already during her studies, as well as directly following her graduation, gz worked at the Frankfurt Kunstverein (under the direction of Nicolaus Schafhausen), until, in 2001, she decided against a career in exhibition procurement and in favour of her own artistic work. Since then, gz has been active as a self-taught video artist in Frankfurt and Stuttgart amongst other appearances.

For further information, visit: www.gabrielezimmermann.de

1 Works with tapes of old music- and video cassettes are currently in process

2 «The myth of Sisyphus» revolves around the central question, which is also the basic question in all philosophy, «whether life is worth the strife it takes to live it, or not». Sisyphus signifies a human being, who has come to realise his actual position within the workings of the world, and by that, to realise the absurdity of his situation. «Absurdity» is what describes the gap between man's desire for purpose and comprehension in life, and the silence of the world in response to this desire, its impenetrability and indifference.

In formulating this experience, Camus demands of man to simply endure this situation, to bear through this life without giving in to illusions. To renounce all solace and transcendence, and take upon himself an existence, deriving its «purpose» solely from its worldly dimension, a «realm, entirely of this mortal world». In his absurd position, Camus thinks, it is exclusively this attitude, which none the less enables man to attain dignity and self-worth. «One must imagine Sisyphus happy.»