

Judith Hopf

30.8 – 30.9 2012

C-salen

MALMÖ KONSTHALL

Judith Hopf (b. 1969) focuses on how our social environments shape us, influence us, and by extension thereby exclude us from ourselves. In her works she depicts society's power structures, regulations and conventions, and presents alternatives to our ingrained patterns.

Hopf uses a wide variety of techniques such as film, sculpture, installation and performance. She often emphasises the body – our point of contact with the world – and how we use the body to relate to other people and objects. Malmö Konsthall presents three of her films and an installation.

Hopf made the film *Türen* (Doors) with Henrik Olesen in 2007. The scenario of the many opening and closing doors creates an association with psychology and the subconscious. The camera action and film clips are extracted from documentary films. The result is chaotic and lacking in any logical sequence of events. The work is a reconstruction of Luis Buñuel's surrealist film *Le Fantôme de la liberté* (The Phantom of Liberty) of 1974.

In *Zählen!* (Count!) from 2008 Hopf uses a thriller-like aesthetic in which beautiful images and film clips build up the tension. But the film's contents do not meet the viewer's expectations. Her films are surprising and one can never be sure what will happen in the next image to appear.

The main character in *Zählen!* is a horse which appears to be skilled at mathematics. People – symbolised here by four clowns – test the horse's knowledge. Every time, the horse answers correctly – it stamps a hoof to count out the right answer. At its side the horse has its trainer, played by the artist herself. The power structure is obvious but presented with a large dose of humour. Humour and the absurd are a recurring element in Hopf's works and are used to make social structures more visible. At the same time, the comic element disarms us: smiling and laughing contain something safe and familiar.

The film is based on a real horse, Hans, which at the beginning of the 20th century was trained in simple math by the German math teacher Wilhelm von Osten. The horse quickly became a sensation and was featured on the cover of the *New York Times*. Finally it was discovered that in fact the horse could not count at all. He merely reacted to the audience's expectations and reactions when he stamped, which made him stop at the correct number every time. The "Clever Hans" effect became a concept in psychology. The question is: how common is this effect today? In our society? In the art world?

In Hopf's latest film *Some End of Things: The Conception of Youth* from 2011 she returns to the theme of the excluding nature of the social environment. An egg tries to find its way into a modernist building but fails. With its rounded shape, the egg does not fit through the rectangular door opening. The comedy touches on the absurd and it is hard not to smile but at the same time one realises that the physical obstacle stopping the egg is by extension also excluding it socially and culturally. The parallels are obvious. Nowadays social pressure has increased – in terms of people's appearance, opinions, etc. It has become even more important to display the 'correct' side of oneself and one's life, for instance on Facebook or in personal encounters with other people.

Judith Hopf's works always create some insecurity and uncertainty in the viewer because they do not follow the accepted norm but rather question and challenge it. Who has really decided what something should look like and how it should be interpreted and presented? And how do these 'rules' influence our lives? Hopf wants to open the door to new and alternative ways for us to encounter the world, and she is constantly highlighting the dualism we all feel inside us between our external selves (our conditioned behaviour) and our true nature.