

The Studio #2

Morena Bamberger

Ethereality

November 26, 2019– April 12, 2020

At the eye level of a cub, I lay in an unfamiliar landscape.

The cold stroked my snout, while the wind blew snowflakes in my face.

An echo of howling approached my ear.

A pack of wolves ran towards me.

They howled while their fur danced in the wind.

They crushed the snow between the stars.

Between their legs shone the calm northern lights.

Morena Bamberger, 2018

Morena Bamberger (1994, Roermond), a recent graduate yet already highly acclaimed, is a master at transforming a space into a magical universe through simple interventions. Her first museum project is aptly entitled *Ethereality*, a contraction of two words with opposite meanings: *ethereal* and *reality*. And indeed this installation of video images shows an alienating mix of boundless, intangible imagination and everyday normality, which is so characteristic of this artist. Bamberger needs little to achieve this. She conjures up her mysterious world with simple materials like plastic sheeting, glitter fabrics and polystyrene sheets that she paints in pastel colours, with turning windmills that scatter moving gleaming lights through the space like stardust. Here and there, projected video images show a world between reality and dream. “My installations”,

says Bamberger, “are a reflection of how I experience reality and how I want to share this experience with my audience”.

For the film, Morena Bamberger went on a spiritual journey to the Swiss mountains – a sort of ‘*vision quest*’, as she calls it – in order to get closer to her intuition and to experience her vulnerability and her strength. We see images of green mountain meadows and lowing cattle, but also a surreal masked figure (the artist), who bangs on a shaman’s drum beside a calm mountain stream. It is the first time that Bamberger herself is the protagonist of her film. Over the past two years, her work has attracted attention for the way in which she explored the surroundings of Roermond with her video camera, and the totally open way in which she involved friends, family and random passers-by (such as two orange street sweepers in a park) in her surrealist world filled with hand-made masks, wizards’ cloaks, strings and threads. This produced some unexpected, disturbing happenings, as shown in her wonderful graduation film *Home ground* from 2018, in which for example a man appears in a white owl’s mask, who eats a dead chick next to a living white owl. (1)

Bamberger is not the first (female) artist to take her audience on a spiritual quest, using a disarming, colourful visual idiom.

Take, for instance, the gender political paintings in fluo and pastel colours by Lily van der Stokker (1954, Den Bosch) and the experimental videos by the Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist (1962, Rheintal) from the 1980’s and 90’s. Closer to home and more recently, there are the compelling, surreal video installations and performances by Melanie Bonajo (1978, Heerlen) and another artist from Heerlen, Tanja Ritterbex (1985), which form an exciting hub of filmed ego-documentaries. Besides transporting the viewer to their surprising universe, these artists also deliberately use the culturally coded visual idiom as criticism of existing social norms and pose questions about gender, sexuality and the female body.

Although there is much common ground, and Bamberger is indebted to these and other artists for her preference for the surreal, the fragile and the mobile, her relationship with reality appears differently orientated. In her work, Bamberger does not want to broach or judge anything. In her own words, she wants to “move with, rather than against”. She takes her range of materials outdoors, to parks, woods and squares. People and animals gravitate towards her, curious about what she is doing. They ask questions, and Bamberger invites them to take part. On the basis of pure improvisation, they then get caught up together in “a moment of spontaneity, expression and adventure”.

