

MAYA SCHWEIZER. A TALL TALE

Dec. 14, 2017 – Feb. 1, 2018

In recent years the artist Maya Schweizer (b. 1976), a resident of Berlin, has been dealing with questions such as perception and memory, identity and homelessness, narrative fiction and everyday life, and migration and integration in her multimedia works. In her films – hybrid mixtures between documentaries and staged accounts – the artist combines images, sound and text into subtle analyses of the present, which always have a historical level, or a concrete link to a collectively remembered location.

In Schweizer's film *A Tall Tale*, produced in 2017, various levels of time and narration coalesce into a collective memory. Initially, the camera explores the real setting of a green summer landscape, interspersed with the ruins of World War II bunkers. Suddenly the voice of Orson Welles resonates from off-camera, inviting the viewer into a "short story, straight from the haunted land of Ireland", for, as the voice continues, "there's no place in the world so crowded with the raw material of tall tales". In quick succession, Schweizer then interweaves black-and-white snippets of found footage and sound fragments from *film noir* and iconic ghost stories on film, like Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, into a brilliant, fantastical story, such as those once orally passed down from generation to generation in Medieval Ireland: "obviously, it's a very fantastic and improbable story".

This is accompanied by the tower, soaring tall as a beacon (or mysterious cipher), out of the ruins of Askeaton Castle, an early 13th century Norman fortress on the banks of the River Deel, with its surrounding waterways ringing with an uncanny chorus of croaking frogs. The tower crystalizes into the concrete artistic focal point for a fictional chain of memories that stretches all the way back to the time of Gothic horror stories. The caws of real ravens observed nesting in the ruins, and echoed in black-and-white closeups of more cawing ravens, together with the cracks and crevices, explored almost tenderly by the camera, in the old walls, are interwoven with the fictional narrative, which conjures up in



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image and sound Edgar Allan Poe's classic horror story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839): "A thin crack extending from the roof, down the front of the building, and into the adjacent lake", observes the narrator, as he arrives at the House of Usher. Even the staged saddled horse, restlessly pawing with its hooves in front of the castle ruin, implicitly refers to the rider approaching the House of Usher.

Schweizer combines *film noir* stylistic devices such as strong dark-light contrasts and extreme high- and low-angle shots with deconstructed story fragments from psycho-thrillers and detective stories such as the invisible man (*l'homme invisible*), from haunted houses, from



crushing mental demoralization due to supernatural phenomena, from love triangles, and from deceptions and murder (see H.-G. Clouzot, *Les Diaboliques*, 1955). However, she always links the level of the "film spirits", which is only ever implied, back to real elements from the present, in this way making the story 'probable'. Thereby the eerie atmosphere

permeating *A Tall Tale* is most notably created by the film's suggestive sound track.

With her stories of ruins and of filmic ruins, Maya Schweizer refers not only to the ambiguity of memory, which (for the artist) can be both fruitful and a hindrance, but also to the great "spirits" of cinema who have left their mark on cinematic history to this day. "Do you believe in ghosts?", the philosopher played by Jacques Derrida is asked in Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983), also a fragment cited in Schweizer's film. Derrida's answer may also be Schweizer's answer: "The cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms. That's what I think the cinema is about when it's not boring. It's the art of allowing the ghosts to come back."

Maya Schweizer (b. 1976 in Paris), lives and works in Berlin. She studied art and art history at the University of Aix-en-Provence (1995-1998). Subsequently, she studied at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (2000-2002) in Leipzig, and transferred in 2003 to the Universität der Künste Berlin in the class of Lothar Baumgarten, where she completed her studies in 2007 as a Master's student. Schweizer has had solo exhibitions in the

Westfälischer Kunstverein (2010), the Frankfurter Kunstverein (2011) with Clemens von Wedemeyer, the Kunstverein Langenhagen (2013), the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2015), and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016). Her most recent solo exhibition was shown in the Kunstverein Leipzig in January 2018.

Maya Schweizer has also been invited to participate in many group exhibitions. Among other countries, she has shown in Germany, France, Israel, China, Poland, Taiwan, Canada and the USA. SELECTED EXHIBITIONS: *Of Mice and Men*, Berlin Biennale, *Storylines*, Kunstraum München (2006); *Magellaneous Cloud*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2007); *Urban Stories*, The X Baltic Triennial of International Art, CAC Vilnius (2009); *Auto-Kino!*, Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin (2010); *Ambiguous Being*, tamtamART, Berlin / Kav16 Community Gallery, Tel Aviv / Hong Gah Museum, Taipei (2012); *Vot ken you mach!*, Kunsthaus Dresden, efa (Elisabeth Foundation for the Arts), New York, *Villa Romana 1905–2013 Das Künstlerhaus in Florenz*, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2013); *Gestern die Stadt von Morgen*, Kunstmuseum Mülheim an der Ruhr (2014); *Im Inneren der Stadt. Öffentlicher Raum und Frei-Raum*, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst (GAK), Bremen, Museum MWW – Muzeum Współczesne, Warsaw, *All Tomorrow's Past*, Kunsthaus Hamburg (2015); Videokunstzentrum, Gelsenkirchen, VOX, Montreal (2016); Anren Biennale, China (2017).

She has won several awards with her work, including a Villa Aurora Fellowship in Los Angeles (2006). Recently Schweizer was awarded a catalogue grant by the KdFS Dresden (2015) and a research scholarship from the Berlin Senate (2017).

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Opening: Wednesday, December 13, 2017 from 7 pm – 9 pm.

An artist's talk with Maya Schweizer and Bettina Steinbrügge (Director of the Kunstverein Hamburg) has been held in the course of the opening.

Duration: December 14, 2017 – February 1, 2018