

#SELFIE_LEIPZIG

Darya von Berner (SP)

21 January - 05 March 2017

Vernissage: Saturday 21 January 2017

10:00 - 18:00 Tuesday to Sunday and bank holidays

Kunstkraftwerk

Saalfelder Straße 8 b

04179 Leipzig

www.kunstkraftwerk-leipzig.com

The site-specific installation, #SELFIE_LEIPZIG by Spanish artist Darya von Berner, interweaves the current obsession with self-portraiture rooted in the myth of Narcissus, with the fascination for industrial relics. Well-versed in the creation of environments that she names *Atmospheres*, von Berner works with the architectural features of a 19th Century plant room and a closed-circuit system to stage the interplay of two protagonists: the historical Kunstkraftwerk and each of its visitors.

Intervening directly onto the architecture of the Kunstkraftwerk, von Berner applies electro-luminescent strips to features such as the pillars, which span the sidewalls at regular intervals, and the staircase leading to the upper floors. The glowing lines embrace the sidewalls up to the top of the pillars. They continue their ascension from the base of the roof structure and join at its apex. The same patterns are repeated for each pillar, and finally frame the internal facade, drawing viewers' gaze into the opposite end of the hall where a spotlight flashes intermittently. It lights up for 8 seconds and switches off for the same duration. Upon entering into its light, the glare is so strong that visitors are cut out from their surroundings. Once inside, they are immediately confronted with a blown-up image of themselves projected onto the wall in front of them, thus becoming part of and completing the installation #SELFIE_LEIPZIG.

By exposing visitors and shifting their scale, von Berner proposes to deconstruct and expose some of the behaviours, motivations and meanings at play in the making of *selfies* whilst touching upon ideas of identity, spectatorship and participation. With a traditional *selfie*, the experiences of delighting in one's image and of sharing it with others are distinct from each other. With #SELFIE_LEIPZIG, the two become one: the taking and the editing which is possible with a *selfie* is supplanted by the collective consumption of a moving portrait

in real-time in the physical space of the Kunstkraftwerk's plant room. The device created by von Berner diverts the 'production line' of *selfies*, which is typically carried out via a tablet or a mobile phone, by rerouting it through the closed-circuit video system and the spotlight installed in the machine hall where one or several visitors are present. Those who have stepped into the beam of light are momentarily stripped from the privacy of passive and anonymous spectatorship.

Some visitors may have understood and accepted the terms of the engagement in advance by observing others and may enter the spotlight quite knowingly and even eagerly. Whichever way visitors are led to engage with the installation, they have, or soon regain, control of the way they appear to others. They can choose to honour the invitation spelled out by the artist in the name of the installation to complete the artwork by turning to their own portable photographic and/or video devices and perform for the camera. The moment they decide to capture their self-image by taking a *selfie*, they are back in the controlling seat. However, this control is limited as their projected moving portrait undermines their effort to take the perfect picture. #SELFIE_LEIPZIG requires visitors to adapt to this situation and develop new skills and behaviours to take the best self-portrait, or in the case of very young visitors, who may not yet have fallen into the habit of *selfies* and the world of portable cameras, to give as good a performance as possible.

The illuminated visitors discover their projected self in real time, as they would discover their reflection in a mirror in the presence of other viewers. The difference between a projection in real-time and a reflection however is fundamental: the scale of their projected image can be altered and in the case of #SELFIE_LEIPZIG, the latter is much bigger than the actual size of their bodies and faces. Their projected silhouette occupies a large area of the internal facade of the plant room. Their bodily proportion becomes as large as the building, which in turn is reduced to a glowing outline evocative of the naive drawing of a house. This shift of scale signifies a change of perspective, as the building moves from an industrial to a cultural use, and visitors become its *raison d'être*. The change is also symptomatic of an era where the pursuit of individual wellbeing and the cult of the self are paramount.

Values such as the sharing and redistributing of wealth throughout the community, developed in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, have been largely deemed utopian and abandoned in favour of the pursuit of individual fulfilment. Participatory art installations such as #SELFIE_LEIPZIG have the ability of reconciling past with present aspirations and of yielding an enjoyable collective experience and a sense of community. As visitors share their *selfies* on social networks, #SELFIE_LEIPZIG acquires an online *alter ego* and an existence beyond the physical site of the plant room and the timeframe of the installation. The Kunstkraftwerk was once a community infrastructure supplying heating to a network of local houses and factories. With the installation

created by Darya von Berner, the industrial relic regains its role as a generator by being at the centre of a new social media community forming around the hashtag of its title.

Curator Stéphanie Delcroix

Saturday 21 January 2017

3 pm and 4 pm

Operatic performance based on *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* by Viktor Ullmann

Duration: circa 15 minutes

To inaugurate the exhibition, the artist Darya von Berner has produced an operatic performance based on *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* by Viktor Ullmann. The performance allows for a musical exploration of the themes of narcissism, exacerbated in the character of dictator *Kaiser Overall*, the main protagonist, and his journey to self-recognition and to his own death.

Viktor Ullmann wrote *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* in 1943 under excruciating conditions whilst he was imprisoned in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in the Czech Republic. He never saw it performed but miraculously managed to save the score.

The piece will be performed by French baritone Boris Grappe who is currently in residence at the Opera National de Paris, accompanied by pianist and conductor Alexander Stessin from Opera Leipzig.

"In each *selfie* lies a tension between a narcissistic attitude and an altruistic wish to share. Taking a *selfie* is motivated by the human need of being part of something, be it a family, a group of friends or a society. Everyone tries to control the way they want to be seen and is aware that others do the same. The working hypothesis of Professor Michael Tomasello, from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, is that only evolved primates are able to operate on the basis of the structure of the *we*.

In contrast to this, a dictatorial attitude does not take into account human beings' aptitude to cooperate for the common good. The dictator is stuck in himself, thinking only about his individual goals, like *Kaiser Overall* who lives in a palace without windows or mirrors, and who like a newborn, has no self-recognition. The beauty of Viktor Ullmann's opera is that at the end, *Kaiser Overall* realises that he has to relate to others and even has to cooperate with Death. "

Darya von Berner, Leipzig 2016

Saturday 4 March 2017
3 pm
Free with exhibition ticket

Darya von Berner will be in conversation with thinkers and scientists on the themes of identity and social behaviour, looking at human beings' differences to, and similarities with, other big primates. Guests and time to be announced shortly on our website: www.kunstkraftwerk-leipzig.com

About Darya von Berner

Darya von Berner studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York under Milton Glaser. Back in Europe, she studied amongst others with Enzo Cucchi, Wolf Vostell, Janis Kounellis and Tony Gragg.

She has received various awards and scholarships, which lead to an extended stay in Paris, followed by a scholarship at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. Since 1991 she has exhibited extensively in galleries throughout Europe and America and regularly participated in art-fairs such as Art Basel, Arco and Art Cologne.

Von Berner's practice has evolved from nature painting and Realism in the 80's, to videoworks presented for the *Worldwide Video Festival* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. More recently she has been involved in public art projects, such as the *Atmospheres* series, for which she has created clouds in monumental architectural contexts. The first of these interventions took place in 2007 in Madrid, when she wrapped the Puerta de Alcalá in an actual cloud. This artistic intervention has since been shown in Paris, Brussels and Cordoba. Her most recent work of this series 'Universal Cloud Flag' was installed in front of the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Furthermore she has produced installations with linear light at emblematic locations of early 20th century modernist architecture such as Weimar and *Yo_Land*, an abbreviated version of Piotr Ilitch Tchaïkovski's opera *Iolanta*, op. 69. set as a promenade performance for former steelworks in Luxembourg.

For Darya von Berner, making art is a powerful device in creating critical sense, her works always evolve through a dialogue within the art system as well as with other cultural or living systems.

About Boris Grappe

Boris Grappe studied voice at the Conservatoire de Lyon under Margaret Honig and at the Hochschule für Musik of Vienna under Ralf Döring. From 2007 to 2011, Boris Grappe was engaged at the Nationaltheater Mannheim where he sang most lyric-baritone roles such as Don Giovanni, Guglielmo, Papageno, Figaro, Schaunard, Ping, Silvio, Harlekin amongst others.

Recently he was invited at Oper Frankfurt (Julietta), Opéra National de Lyon (Le Roi Carotte), Grand Théâtre de Genève (Le Médecin Malgré Lui), Opéra de Nancy (Geneviève de Brabant), Opéra National de Paris (La Traviata) and at Festival such as Rhurtriennale (Moses and Aron, Tristan and Isolde). In 2017, he will be performing in Carmen in Opéra National de Paris.

About Alexander Stessin

After studying piano, composition and musicology in Moscow, Alexander Stessin moved to Israel and studied orchestral conducting with Mendi Rodan, Michael Gielen and Dennis R. Davies, and choral conducting with Walter Hagen-Groll. He was subsequently repetitor at Opera Kiel, Theatre Hagen and Theater Darmstadt. From 2009 to 2012, he conducted "Sleeping Beauty", "Nutcracker", "Wildcat", "Countess Mariza" and "Crazy For You" as well as symphony concerts at Theater Nordhausen.

Since 2012, Alexander Stessin is choir director at the Leipzig Opera. He is teaching conducting and score reading at the University for Music and Theatre Leipzig. He wrote his own opera for children "Can you whistle, Joanna?" which has been produced by Theatre Augsburg.

#SELFIE_LEIZPIG has received the support of Matadero Madrid, Centre for Contemporary Creation.

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