

EEVA-MARI HAIKALA

7 October to 16 December 2017

For the first show in our new space we are delighted to present works of the finnish artist Eeva-Mari Haikala. Haikala is a performance artist who uses various media to present her works. In 2015/16 she participated at the Wiels-Residency program and is since then living in Brussels.

The german language knows the term „Prozesshaftigkeit“, a term which to me describes the core of performance art quite fittingly. It's a content and time based art form, with some kind of narrative, though unlike a theatre performance, is rather based on a conceptual approach, which, in its process aims to make us aware of certain things surrounding us. This often happens through the creation of intense physical or psychological experiences that the performers undergo by putting themselves in awkward and/or demanding situations.

Haikalas' performance which is executed with Hamish MacPherson, is based upon notes and diaries of the welsh painter Gwen John in which John describes her love affair with Rodin. Being a rather passionate character she in the end manages to alienate Rodin by showing him too much affection. Haikala uses her performance to describe the physical and mental strains a relationship can bring to a person. While not being sexually explicit, the heavy breathing might refer to sexual acts but could also refer to the (mental) exhaustion that can be caused by an unbalanced situation. In her work, based before a pitch dark background she also introduces concepts and theories of painting into the video.

In „Beetroot“ Haikala appears in front of the camera in what can be described as typical old-fashioned white mens underwear. She positions herself in front of a wall and starts to insert a beetroot into said underwear. When it slips out she repeats the process. Through the insertion of the beetroot the underwear starts to color red.

In the process she touches onto gender related questions surrounding the concept of masculinity and femininity. By appearing in that kind of underwear, and putting something into it, which could in that context appear like mens genitalia, she quite literally seems to try to grow a pair of balls. Paradoxically she then starts to bleed profusely, which shifts the context again and leaves the viewer puzzled as to which kind of sex is in the end on display. This feeling might be enhanced by the grainyness of the video, relating it to the beginning of performance art where those kind of questions in performances of e.g. Carolee Schneeman were strongly prevalent.

If the answers to these questions are, as hinted to in the work „The only happiness i know is sad happiness (Curtain)“ are veiled or are hidden in plain sight remains the question.