

THE COMMON GUILD

Visual arts: Projects / Events / Exhibitions



Photo by Kendall Koppe

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COMMENTARIES

Ulla von Brandenburg

2 April – 21 May 2011



'Neue Alte Welt'

Creating Worlds

The maps of the Old World represented the world as it was known to classical antiquity. The maps of the New World contained the discovery of new territories, thereby increasing both knowledge and the horizon line. The title of this exhibition neatly combines the two to create a 'New Old World' and as a metaphor, provides a way to read the methods of von Brandenburg's practice. Von Brandenburg frequently draws widely from both 'old' and 'new' references—Greek tragedy, Brecht, art historical devices such as 'tableau vivant' or 'Gesamtkunstwerk'—in order to create finite worlds within her work.

The first work encountered at The Common Guild is the operatic black and white film *Chorspiel* (2010). A family unit of three distinct generations sit outdoors, all within the boundaries of a carefully delineated white rectangle traced on the ground. Their 'backdrop' is the edge of a dark forest. The Wanderer then enters this frame, and in doing so casts the family as the 'Old World' and himself as change and the 'New World'. He is the spectator to the family's activities and they will reflect upon themselves differently in his presence.

Von Brandenburg creates moments that make her audience aware that they are involved in the performance of this exhibition within the finite architectural boundaries of a particular gallery space, a Victorian town house. As we come down the staircase and pause on the last step, we 'enter' her work. Painted on the wall across from us are the tiers of *Theatre* (2011). Our particular viewpoint animates us in the role of acting, on the stage, looking across to our audience. *Krawatten, abgeschnitten* (2010), is a line of cut-up ties, hanging just above our heads in the liminal space of a doorway, causing us to both physically and psychologically encounter both our entrance and exit point. From the darkness of the downstairs room we have risen in the building to enter the new stage of this light-filled room. Indeed, three of the works

in this room reference light; *Mephisto* (2010), *Angel* (2010) and *Falten* (2010) have their surfaces altered by areas bleached by the sun.

Von Brandenburg shows us the transformations and manipulations of performance and theatre with *Schachtel* (2010), a cardboard box filled with a number of tightly rolled-up ribbons. The Wanderer had brought with him a box into the filmic world of *Chorspiel*. That box had remained unopened. Now a box of slightly different dimensions lies opened upstairs in the light room. This repetition, with its jump from filmic timeframe to gallery reality, alludes to a larger cycle within von Brandenburg's work that plays with the illusion of certainty in a finite world. What lies beyond it? As the elements of von Brandenburg's works morph between presentations, the artist hints at the finiteness of our lives and the things that lie beyond our horizon that are neither finished nor begun.

*'We didn't choose,
it was done to us.
Now we are here,
but for how long?'*¹

Jenny Brownrigg is Exhibitions Director at The Glasgow School of Art.

1. Ulla von Brandenburg, *Chorspiel* (excerpt), 2010.