

Jennifer West

Paintballs and Pickle Juice

6th February – 4th April 2010

The US-American artist Jennifer West (lives in Los Angeles, grew up in Topanga Canyon) transforms gallery and museum spaces into intensely colourful, glimmering, psychedelic scenarios by means of large-scale film projections. In order to do this, she uses 16, 35 or 70 mm film which is then subjected to a performative process best described as a kind of »action painting«. The celluloid is duly sprayed, painted, and treated with all manner of everyday materials; she uses everything other than traditional paint itself as her colouring agents: deodorant sprays, green M&Ms, motorcycle tracks, lipstick, sweat, nail varnish, a variety of foodstuffs, and more besides.

The synaesthetic components of these materials used in the application of colour represent the situations themselves duly depicted in the film, which in turn functions as a kind of substrate. For example, she applies utensils, comestibles, and scents associated with camping onto a strip of film depicting a campfire situation. It is possible to recognise the scenario behind a brightly coloured veil comprising marshmallow, beer, insect sprays as well as in the creases caused by the folding of the film into a sleeping bag. Thus the »props« of this scenario become the actual layer of paint so that Jennifer West is effectively re-emphasising the situation being depicted—and in this case, postulating a desire for a free life in the natural world, which is nevertheless integrally bound up with civilisation.

Jennifer West constructs predominantly everyday situations or human encounters in her films. Together with friends or artist colleagues, she depicts a supposed light, easy normality of a given situation. Upon closer scrutiny however, hidden codes and strange rules of our society, or simply absurd situations, emerge in these scenarios from beneath the layers of material: the fact that it is prohibited to bathe naked in California is sublimely subverted by the artist in her »Skinnydipping Carbon Beach Malibu Film« by flaunting that very rule and staging the action in a prominent location. Alternatively, she invites skaters into a museum and uses their skating moves as painting tools by further treating film—depicting the Californian skies and which has already been doused with ink and melon juice—with the tracks of their boards, effectively shifting the ascription of the various meeting places as well as publicly staging a peer group activity.

In her approach—which is, formally speaking, painting—Jennifer West is consciously alluding to a process-oriented way of working of, say, a Jackson Pollock or a Sigmar Polke; at the same she refers to positions within structural film, such as Tony Conrad, Michael Snow, or Jack Goldstein, inasmuch as she thematises the medium film with her work. However, over and above this, her works alternate throughout between the real and the abstract, between narrative and contemplation, thereby revealing a compelling aesthetic experience, which invites the viewer to him or herself in this pictorial universe.

Jennifer West has participated in recent shows at the Tate London (2009), the CACP Bordeaux (2009), and White Columns in New York (2007); alongside various gallery and art fair presentations (such as Art Unlimited Basel, 2008), her works have also been shown in a solo exhibition at the Transmission Gallery in Glasgow (2008). In Germany, Jennifer West took part in the »Between Two Deaths« show at the ZKM in Karlsruhe and in June this year, she will be participating in the exhibition »Zelluloid – Film ohne Kamera« at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main. She is represented by the Marc Foxx Gallery in Los Angeles and Vilma Gold in London.

Guided Tours: Sunday, 28th February at 3 pm and Thursday, 25th March 2010 at 6 pm
Opening times: Wednesday – Sunday 2 pm – 6 pm; also by arrangement.