

Sies + Höke Galerie

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Pressrelease

STRAND | Isa Genzken, Blinky Palermo, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Schütte

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In the current exhibition *STRAND*, Sies + Höke shows small-format drawings, watercolours and sculptures by Blinky Palermo, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Schütte, Isa Genzken and Sigmar Polke.

One of the works shows the nude upper body of a recumbent woman. Her head is cut off by the left edge of the picture. She seems to have fallen asleep and dropped her book by her side. This delicate pencil-drawing by Gerhard Richter was created in 1985 and is remarkable in that there are few similar works in the artists' oeuvre. The woman is not recognizable, but the intimacy of the drawing suggests that it depicts Isa Genzken, his wife at the time, who is calmly asleep before the artist. The contours of her body softly merge with the lines with which Richter depicts the surroundings – probably a coastal landscape. Gerhard Richter was 51, Isa Genzken was 37 when this drawing was made. They had married three years previously.

While Richter worked his drawing like an academic study from the nude in places, Palermo's small watercolour appears to have been drawn much quicker. The gaze is directed onto the back of a woman wearing bikini who is relaxing in a deck-chair. With his quick, confident brush-strokes Palermo captured a moment in which both the portrayed and the portraitist apparently felt unobserved. The distinctive vantage point, the detail and the warm colours let the female body appear very close. The watercolour was done in 1965, Palermo was 22 and living with Ingrid Denneborg, who was 8 years his senior, and her daughter. It was probably Ingrid's familiar body which Palermo flattered with his brush-strokes. The artist deliberately left the broken punched upper edge of the sheet attached to the drawing after tearing it from the sketchpad and emphasized the sensuality of the moment. They bear witness to moments of deeply felt affection and closeness. The exhibition allows the male artists a liberal gaze, as shown by *Der Großer Polke*, floating above a nude female back, stretched out beneath him. The self-irony of the drawing negates any encroachment, but we still look at it differently today than in 1966, the year this drawing was made.

Sigmar Polke began taking photographs in 1969 and experimented with the artistic possibilities of the camera and the development process. The photo of his first wife Karin, the mother of his children Georg and Anna, was taken in 1970. Polke was 29 at the time. A blurred and hazy female nude is visible, its lightness contrasting with the dark background.

Isa Genzken's *Weltempfänger*, the only female contribution to the exhibition, give a welcome disruption to this idyll of the male gaze. The concrete radios with their extended antennae appear to be searching for radio-stations with seemingly audible white noise. Genzken created her first *Weltempfänger* in 1987, the series continues to this day. The many large and small concrete-cast radios represent communication or communication disrupted. Once you can hear the white noise in your head, it is joined there by the invoked images of the artist, such as Wolfgang Tillmans' many photographs of Isa Genzken, or Elisabeth Peyton's 2010 portrait of her. Tillmans and Peyton are looking to encounter the fascinating other and their personal history with their camera or brush. Unlike them, Richter has captured the lightness of the intimate moment with his former wife in his drawing. Richter, Polke and Palermo were probably inspired by the naturalness of their nude partners who felt unobserved. These are surreptitious moments, which they were trying to capture. It is a gaze which does not want to be returned.

Thomas Schütte is six years younger than Isa Genzken and, like her, studied under Gerhard Richter. The female nude, which plays a secondary role in the oeuvre of the other three male artists, forms the central motif of his sculptural practice. The small sculpture of 2017, titled *Bronzefrau VIII* shows a female figure lying on her side. The legs are slightly angled and the head rests on the right arm. The combination of different materials and the diverse surface treatment is characteristic of Schütte's work. He models the figure and the plinth from clay, whereby the plinth is probably made similarly to a brick, from a mould. The figure sinks into the plinth so

deeply in places, as if he were trying to keep her in this pose forever. This work is part of a series. Reclining bodies are depicted in multiple variations, some distorted to the point beyond recognition as lumps of hand-kneaded or rolled clay. The clay model is subsequently cast in bronze and patinated. Figure and plinth form a green and evenly patinated sculptural unit which in turn sits on another plinth made of steel.

Women are represented in a reclining pose in Schütte's oeuvre, men are standing. He says: „It would not work the other way around. It is important to reflect on what it actually means. But the other way around would just not be possible.“

Schütte depicts the traditional allocation of roles as a law, to which to which we are bound. Men are bound to stand, women to lie down. Both standing and reclining pose hold both privilege and burden simultaneously.

The exhibition *STRAND (BEACH)* examines the relationship between men and women from different points of view and raises the question whether serenity and consonance are only ever possible for short moments. The title may be understood as a break from gender conflict, as a reference to a place of longing with instinctive naturalness and lightness in relationships or for a transmission frequency finally found...

Text: Susanne Küper

¹ Johannes Halder; *Thomas Schütte im Kunsthaus Bregenz - Männer stehen, Frauen liegen*, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Beitrag vom 13.7.2019.

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