

'Life is Perfect'

This is the title that Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven has chosen for her new exhibition in the Galerie Barbara Thumm. It is a statement full of uncertainties. Does Van Kerckhoven (although of course as a Belgian she does not think in German) refer to something finished in grammatical terms, as defined by the Duden, 'the German perfect tense is used for actions that have been completed', or does she use 'perfect' as an adjective in the sense of pristine, unblemished? To speak of life in these terms seems problematic, and in the light of current circumstances almost provocatively utopian.

Van Kerckhoven explicitly refers to a book by Raoul Vaneigem published in 1979, *Le livre des plaisirs (The Book of Pleasures)*. All this further complicates possible interpretations since Vaneigem's book is about pleasures and not about life. Should the chapters chosen by Van Kerckhoven be read as an instruction for a perfect life, or rather as a manifesto about the (completed) life in the perfect tense?

Born in 1934 in Belgium, Raoul Vaneigem, together with Guy Debord, Asger Jorn and others, became a co-founder and activist of the Situationist International in 1961. He contributed and shaped many of the ideas of this avant-garde movement, which he left in 1970. Today he lives in Barcelona.

In essence, this movement favoured anarchism and rejected norms, valuing the individuality of every person in society. A self-determined life can be found through poetry and freedom. There could be no better description of Van Kerckhoven's own ambition to follow the path of these (utopian) aims through visual art, literature and music. Her all-

encompassing aspiration is reflected in the broad range of media she uses.

The group of works in this exhibition gives visual expression to a phenomenon which can be described with the term 'translation'. Through quotes, Van Kerckhoven connects her work to a book which has fascinated and inspired her, and she responds to these ideals in the language of a very different medium. While these instructions for individual happiness are clear and concrete when expressed in words, they seem abstract when turned into material, form and colour. This nonverbal translation appeals to our senses: While words express aims and aspirations and give instructions for action, the images inspired by them create meditation in the abstraction of what forms the composition. Alternating geometrical patches of colour express a tension between figure and ground. Oscillating between foreground and background, they evoke the movement of the act of seeing. Here and there, we can see elements of a figuration which seems to have been modelled on a photograph and thus expresses a moment of memory and of the past.

This takes us back to the 'perfect' state of something that has been completed. In times like ours, 'Life is perfect' is a statement that can only be understood as an anarchic invitation to work towards a perfect, flawless life through self-discovery and artistic self-esteem. It is also an invitation to the viewer to engage with this translation.

Friedrich Meschede