

Stef Heidhues

Backstage with the Modern Dancers

Galerie EIGEN + ART Berlin

February 11 - March 20, 2021



Stef Heidhues, *Untitled (frames. twin. white)*, 2020, steel, silicone mat, 82 x 69 x 82 cm

“This is no game. Here there is no interlude. To disillusion you, we don’t need illusion. We don’t play fate. We don’t play any dreams. We don’t play out any plot.”

What Peter Handke introduced in 1966 in his stage play “Offending the Audience” applied equally for the space behind the stage: the backstage area. Here, too, there is no game. There is no alienation effect, no acting-as-if, no public realm. In the backstage area, the roles are abandoned. This area is more honest, more authentic, maybe somewhat dirtier and at the same time more exclusive. For her exhibition, Stef Heidhues chose the title *Backstage with the Modern Dancers*. Applied to Heidhues’ works, “Backstage” also means that nothing is pretended. Her minimalistic approach makes it possible from the beginning to negate media deceptions and the promises of the pictorial world. The steel pipe is no fable animal; the rubber and the fluorescent tubes don’t disguise themselves.

Let’s look first at the floor. The installation *Braces* casts cables in loops and lets the thick, black line of the tube break where it kinks, in order to illuminate the next curve with new verve. What is concrete here, along with the material, is a line that runs through various thicknesses, impulses, and directions, like a drawing. Lithe, light. Massive, rigid. Cold, angular. Blurred, glowing. Schizophrenic and elegant at the same time. The bulges and breaks must be traversed on foot. This floor drawing is also a reference to the dancers, who are not present. Markings on their stage floors can help them dance pinpointed positions and choreographies. Heidhues’ installation seems like a translation of such markings into an abstract model of a landscape. In the public performance space, such marks are not visible to

the audience, but the viewer can experience this transformation in Stef Heidhues’ private backstage area.

What is still in a light, moving flow Below hardens Above in its graphic end position. The artwork *Awning* grasps like fingers or claws past the viewer through the room. It consists of fragments of a roof, a canopy, or an awning that would normally cast pleasant shadow. But not here. The work gives the viewer no relief. *Awning* defines the dimension of a room, as a basic architectonic framework and as organic extremities grown long that remain unreachable even with one’s arms outstretched. Tension arises, and one cannot shed the evolutionary reflex to keep one’s eyes on these vibrations in the air.

In another place, the hard materiality of the neon lamps is broken up by black rubber, which, in its spread-out form, could also substitute for a painting on canvas. Close up, one recognizes the signs of wear, a surface that has already lived. Illuminated, it appears almost gesturally painted out. But black rubber also implies eroticism, fetishes, and costumes; on the other hand, the dark rubber mat is reminiscent of bodybuilding areas, loading zones, and security floors in workplaces. Its robustness means the material can withstand a lot without backing down. In Heidhues’ artworks, the surface effortlessly radiates a dominant (stage) presence, its charismatic existence quietly powerful. In this way, an unexpected tranquility arises in *Exit for Renegades*, a peculiar peacefulness with clear relations.

The aesthetic in Stef Heidhues’ works reveals a directness in the hardness and clarity and in the resilient plastic inherent in the black-and-white nakedness of their appearances. Similar aesthetic dispositives of concretized reduction were used in Dorothea Rockburne’s abstract painting and in the radicalness of Hubert Kiecol’s scarf-foldings.

“The dimension of possibility is part of the work,” wrote Stef Heidhues about the works of her professor Franz Erhard Walther, with whom she studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg from 1999 to 2005.

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Here, too, the issue was the idea of the uncompleted work of art, of the empty spaces and the ruptures that appear when a narrative emerges too clearly. When the artist today brings the backstage area into play as an (imaginary or even real) starting point or venue for works, then this site, too, must be examined for the dimensions of possibilities. If what happens on stage really multiplies the potency of the ideas, they are ultimately still captured in the purpose of their game and in their narrative character. Heidhues peels off the costumes and the narrative ambiguity; what remains are fragments, scaffoldings, contrasts, and constellations. The possibilities behind the story lie precisely here.

The colors of the make-up are flesh tones, rouge variants, or lipstick shades that accentuate the room. The works *NoSign#3* and *NoSign#4* can thus be read from the skin. The "Physical Con" of the rosy complexion becomes on the darker skin "Physical Social" and "Con Tact". In the rouge of the cheeks, the lips' "Tance Dis" is suddenly a "Dis Connected" or a "Dis Tance Zone". But there is no unambiguous way of reading here, either. The dancers, after all, are not here to be asked. That's what defines the backstage area - the dissolution of the planned narrations.

Larissa Kikol
Translation by Mitch Cohen

Biography

born 1975 in Washington D.C., USA
lebt und arbeitet in Berlin

1999-2005 Study of Visual Arts at HfBK Hamburg
with Franz Erhard Walther

2003 École nationale des Beaux Arts Lyon,
France

Scholarships/Awards

2011 Artist in residence, APT Studio Programm,
New York City

2012/13 EHF 2010 Trustee Programm, Konrad-Adenauer-
Stiftung

2015/16 Travel grant for Los Angeles, Konrad-Adenauer-
Stiftung

2016 Artist in residence, CCA Andratx, Mallorca

2017 Travel grabt Beijing, China, Geka e.V.

2018 Fellowship Villa Aurora, Los Angeles

2020 Artist in residence, CCA Andratx, Mallorca

Solo exhibitions (selection)

2021 Backstage with the Modern Dancers,
Galerie EIGEN + ART Berlin

2020 Die Souffleure, Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig

2018 Martin Groß. Stef Heidhues, Galerie EIGEN + ART
Leipzig

2016 SPACE TAKERS SPACE MAKERS,
nationalmuseum, Berlin

BRAKE BABY, Tacho, Berlin

2015 BETWEEN HERE AND NOW, Marion Scharmann,
Cologne

2013 Trespassers Only, Rudolf Scharpf Galerie,
Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen

2012 Come As We Are, Marion Scharmann Gallery, Köln
Yes Sir, No Sir, Kunstverein Springhornhof,
Neuenkirchen

Group exhibitions (selection)

2021 RAUM-ZEIT-ODYSEE, Mies van der Rohe Haus,
Berlin

2020 „in other words...“, Labor Projektgalerie, Cologne

2019 not everything means something, honey, Galerie
EIGEN + ART Leipzig

RealitätsCheck, Sammlung Peters-Messer,
Kunstraum Potsdam

Maske. Kunst der Verwandlung, Kunstmuseum
Bonn

Peninsula, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Intoto, invited by Thomas Fugeirol, L40, Berlin

2018 Spuren im Raum, Bundeskunsthalle Bonn

2017 Revolte, Galerie EIGEN + ART Berlin

Und hier ist Beginn und das Ende ist dort,
Hothouse 4 Rough Translations, Munich

Elastic Collisions, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna,
Austria

2016 Formen in der Dämmerung. invited by Jérôme
Chazeix. Kunsthalle M3, Berlin

De Lirio / Raritätenladen, invited by Caro
Suerkemper, Galerie Braubach five, Frankfurt

Trading Places - Vom Handeln der Dinge, Galerie
5020, Salzburg, Austria

2015 Lady Fitness Contemporary presents Kunstverein
Amrum @ Jtatsion

No Show, tête, Berlin curated by Adrian Schiesser
trinkets for the rich, nationalmuseum, Berlin

Drawing Storage, Goethe Institut, Bologna, Italy

2014 On Paper, Gallery Christine König, Vienna, Austria

Das MAHO Programm. About Sculpture, Lady
Fitness, Contemporary Artspace, Berlin

Liebe / Love. Wilhelm-Hack-Museum Ludwigshafen

Ground Control To Major Tom, Marion Scharmann
Gallery, Cologne

2013 Gastspiel Rheinland, Galerie Mathias Güntner,
Hamburg

Viola Bittl. Stef Heidhues. Philip Seibel,
EIGEN + ART Lab, Berlin