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Carpe Fucking Diem

A solo exhibition by Elina Brotherus

12 November 2015 to 16 January 2016

The films and photography of Elina Brotherus are mainly of landscapes and portraits. Her subjects are evidence of both purely formal research that delights in references to compositions from art history while also exploring human existence.

Starting with the series *Landscapes and Escapes* (1998-99), by studying the relationship between the individual and his surroundings, Brotherus addresses the human longing to occupy a territory: “*Though I am not necessarily present in every image, it is important that I present myself through the world around me and the world through me.*” (Elina Brotherus, Helsinki, May 1999.) Now fifteen years later, the exhibition *Carpe Fucking Diem* picks up again on the theme of the human form in nature, though this time the aftereffect is ambivalent. To begin with the title seems contradictory: the epicurean phrase that encourages living in the moment with the knowledge that the future is in doubt and that nothing lasts appears to be challenged.

Five videos and six photographs compose the exhibition like musical variations. Three of the videos are from the series *Tango Trousers* (2015), produced by the Serlachius Art Museum in Mänttä, Finland. Brotherus sought out the accordionist Maria Kalaniemi to create new compositions for the short works, shot in Mänttä. Music is often important in Brotherus’ universe and this accompaniment was essential.

In the exhibition, the photographs appear to prolong the videos and vice versa. Our gaze flows from one medium to the other, from a snippet of movement to a motionless instant.

The exhibition will launch Elina Brotherus’ new book *Carpe Fucking Diem*, published by Kehrer Verlag. The book is designed by the Dutch graphic artist Teun van der Heijden, known for constructing photo books as if editing a movie. In her new videos, Brotherus sought to reverse the process, creating films like putting together an album or a series of photos. Another ambiguity occurs in the duality of emotions emerging from the images: human beings who are at times in symbiosis with their natural surroundings, and at others don’t belong. *Marcello’s Theme* (2015, 6’11”) is an enigmatic video with the artist and a dog in a forest or on the edge of a town, then pausing near a dead fox. Later the artist appears in a house as she contemplates the forces of the nature through a window. The accordion of Kalaniemi contributes to the meditative atmosphere. Each movement is marked by a different framing and different costume that stands out from the surroundings or fades into it. Is this an investigation into identity, referring to the human and animal elements side by side in all of us? The video *Mirror piece* (2015, 0’58”) doesn’t truly answer the question.

Brotherus explained that creating vast spaces in the series *Landscapes and Escapes* was a way of creating a resting place for the spectator. Now, the stark and uncompromising head-on images (*Camouflage*, 2013) turn us into accomplices of her reality.

Brotherus is interested in the early performance art of the 1960s and 70s. In two videos in the exhibition, *Mirror Piece* (2015, 0'58") and *Event for the Midnight* (2015, 1'10") she uses instructions by a Japanese Fluxus artist (Shiomi Mieko, 1963). The staging of these intimate solitary performances, some during the day, some at night, explores the place of man in the vast and complex universe. Simple gestures are repeated and reframed, and achieve a nearly surreal or illusory resonance. The images appear to scroll by like a narration that's both dreamlike and sad. The ordinary becomes strange, the familiar turns threatening.

Landscape gives way to a theatrical scene in the 16mm film *Howl* (2015, 5'19") shot with Finnish American artist Victoria Schultz. Two women remove their animal masks. One is bald and the other combs her hair, then walks a dog. The women begin to dance, the younger with her feet tied. They pour water, then one of them recites 'Howl', the Allen Ginsberg poem. The film uses the same literary device, parataxis, as was used by the poet, placing images and fragments together without coordination. The performative piece is an homage in form and substance to the subversive spirit of Ginsberg. It is also a testament to life in general, a sort of resistance to the diktat of convention.

Carpe Fucking Diem, seventh solo exhibition by Elina Brotherus at gb agency is possibly sometimes bitter but certainly embraced acknowledgement of an inquiry into human existence and its capacity to search for something better.

News

Elina Brotherus: Les Femmes de la Maison Carré (solo), Maison Louis Carré, Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, until Nov 29, 2015

Les Femmes de la Maison Carré (solo), Galleria Heino, Helsinki, Jan 8 -31, 2016

Yo, me, mi, contigo, Visiona festival, Huesca, Nov 29, 2015 - Feb.28, 2016

Italy Inside Out, Palazzo della Ragione, Milano, Nov 10, 2015 - Feb 6, 2016

Gesture towards the self, Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, until March 16, 2016

Waterscapes, Stadtgalerie Kiel, Kiel, until Nov 22, 2015

Ich kenne kein Weekend. Archive and Collection René Block, Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, until Jan 24, 2016

Remember Lidice, Edition Block, Berlin, until Feb 13, 2016