

A TRUE FAN STANDS CERTAINLY

EVENTS BETWEEN IMAGE AND REALITY

It is extremely tempting to squeeze through the filigree wood frame and rows of folding chairs to investigate once, as swiftly as can be, whether you can in fact catch a glimpse of the playing field. The barrier, however, is too high, and obscures your view. This disappointment, already alluded to in the title's triple negation, cuts directly to the essence of the installation *not this, not that, not nothing* (*nicht dies, nicht das, nicht nichts*) by Thea Timm. It creates a non-tactile interplay in different dimensions: between inside and outside, between sensory experience and mental abstraction.

We are standing in an exhibition room which is drawn out lengthwise and are observing from behind a 2.5-metre-high wood structure which curves slightly, implying an oval. The construction's latticed-wood frame, upon which three levels of folding chairs are mounted, underlines the standardized modular system and its backdrop-like presence. The grandstand fragment seems light and inspires feelings of anticipation and emptiness all at once. It extends out into the room in such a manner that a third of the illuminated surface at the back is detached. Those viewing from the entryway are left with only a narrow, shadowy passageway. A slide projector dimly lights the entryway, quickly flashing a sequence of sculptural arrangements; variations constructed of ordinary materials which, as a playful series of experiments, offer insight into the creative thought process. Apart from this, all views of the installation, although they are eagerly directed at the alluring light beyond, are reflected back off the backs of the steeply climbing tiers.

not this not that, not nothing is a section of a grandstand which the artist displays as an object while considering its quality as imagery. A grandstand is normally a concentrically stepped facility surrounding the playing field in a stadium. Its dual function as a mix of stage and fan area allows both an optimal view of "them down there", thanks to elevated seating, and puts the audience itself on display. Yet Timm's installation thwarts both intentions. She forces the observer to look from backstage, from a gap, where it is not even possible to see through the rows of chairs at what is presumably taking place. It is all the more surprising that the view which is limited to the backs of the old wooden chairs sharpens the perception of the surroundings; this viewpoint simultaneously triggers forgetfulness of oneself and acutely enhanced perception, feelings fed further by the ever-rotating reel of slides.

Through this, Thea Timm achieves a shift in perspective which addresses the staging of architecture, space and emptiness, and the relationship between spectator and player, stage

and grandstand. Various stadiums which the artist had previously examined provided the basis for this work. They were incorporated into the installation as abstract sketches in altered scales and with different materials. Moreover, the implementation of genuine elements alludes to an actual site: the *Deutschlandhalle* in Berlin, the place the artist borrowed the folding chairs from. The grandstand itself represents a space which is in a constant state of transformation and redefinition. "What fascinates me is its many facets. The *Deutschlandhalle* was erected for the Olympic Games in 1936 in only eight months; it was opened by Hitler and was the largest multi-purpose facility in the world. For years they have been debating tearing it down because, of course, it no longer meets today's demands for use by the media, and probably only a portion of the arena, the recently renovated ice hockey rink, will be integrated into a new complex. This transformation intrigues me."

Thea Timm's work balances on a narrow perch between functional construction and aesthetic deconstruction; not entirely sculpture, but not entirely imagery either. At first glance her installations, models, films and photographs give the impression of cool calculation. But she is in no way merely concerned with realizing an intellectual concept, she is equally interested in the physical presence of ideas and forms that can be perceived with the senses. Again and again, she considers sites which are overlaid with a network of connections, associations and alterations, and the emotions people experience in these places. In particular, the artist inquires about the spatial aspect of memory and, its corollary, about the memories spaces have – because concrete locations are bound to the presence of something immaterial, to memories, to a specific aura or a special atmosphere. Timm's various room sections deal with a particular type of spatialized memory which creates spaces which cannot be delineated, but instead appear segmented and detached. All experiences have a spatial element, given that they are invariably intertwined with projections and thus take on characteristics of a trauma. Seen from this perspective, spaces can actually be quite traumatic. Timm's works revolve around the phenomena of illusion, dream and false memory, and the constructed reality which she approaches with various conceptual strategies. On the one hand she builds her installations out of a conglomeration of original parts and additional elements and, on the other hand, she showcases them through the emphatic choreography of extremely bright light, mist and twilight, thereby distorting perception. Timm frequently determines the position of the viewer and his or her line of vision by making doors impassable or entryways somehow blocked. By denying anticipated overviews, insights and perceptions, the installations contribute to their own fragmentation and the skewed way in which they are perceived. They keep viewers at a distance yet create dramatic effects that involve the body and the senses.

Whereas *not this, not that, not nothing* examines the architecture of a public building – a stadium – the artist's work *transfer* looks at private spaces as another venue for collective forms of behaviour, which are therefore structured by change. In 2005, for an exhibition project in an old building which was being restored, she made a copy of an outdoor toilet which was to be moved inside an apartment as part of the refurbishment. The toilet, reconstructed to a scale of 1:33.5, was so finely reproduced that even the dust on the green pipes of the original was recreated. The "real" toilet cabin, which is obviously facing imminent destruction, can still be entered, so that visitors can directly compare the original and the model and check for accuracy by moving from one to the other – with the sole restriction that the toilet door of the model is locked. Visitors can only look at it from above. In arranging her work thus, Timm is making it clear that, although she dedicated herself to detail, her aim was not to create a doll's house toilet but to say something about the outdoor toilet's anticipated move into the apartment. This luxurious sanitary facility may be very pleasant, but this "internalisation" of a thing that was traditionally placed outside represents a change in attitudes to housing and social rituals. *transfer* therefore addresses the transformation of interiors, a process which, throughout alterations in function and lifestyle, can best be traced by observing the fixed floor plan. The issue is not so much one of visible and invisible changes as a description of the conscious and subconscious perception of spatial changes and shifts.

The imaginary interface between the real place and its altered perception in the model is the basis of many of Timm's works, as in the case of *cabin in the woods*. The installation, which was created in 2004, is a copy of her grandmother's cabin, which the artist moved from southern Germany to a gallery in Kiel in northern Germany. While it is important for understanding *transfer* to know that the original exists as a basis for the model, viewers of *cabin in the woods* only have a hint on their invitations that this is a faithful copy of an original. At first we enter the exhibition room almost entirely disoriented, as it is filled with fog. As we fumble our way through the mist, we get a strangely ambivalent feeling which is somewhere between irritation and curiosity, between exposure and secrecy. Once we reach the wooden cabin and hesitate, about to enter the unexpected intimacy of the place, we realize that the doors are locked. "The interior of *cabin in the woods* is not to be experienced by entering the cabin, but by looking through a window. The installation can only be perceived as a picture, a surface. I equate this with the process of memory, which never corresponds to reality, but which is a construct from stories, photographs, hindsight, images and personal feelings. I want to activate this idea with the picture I present." At the same time the artist undermines the distance she has sought to create by deliberately giving the installation an emotional atmosphere and moody elements: *cabin in the woods* is a space full of ideas and stories which retrieve images sunk deep in our memories. There are also clear

reminiscences of the aesthetic and of the oppressive atmosphere of the 1960s, when the cabin was constructed. "The picture I am creating forms a projection screen for the viewer, whose own feelings and memories can be triggered. People who experienced the 1960s in Germany react differently to the work than people from other cultures. At the same time, it is such a simple picture that anyone can find a way to identify with it." The choice of a locked cabin as an object is strategic in two senses. On the one hand, the cabin itself is an intimate and secretive refuge in the middle of the woods as well as a natural occurrence in a light-and-fog setting which viewers can experience with all their senses. On the other hand, it is a thought process in concrete form bearing on the workings of memory taking place in a diffuse fashion and in another period – the past. Penetrating those memories would be like disturbing the fragile order of things.

In her video work *home sweet home* Timm also creates an atmosphere which she describes as floating between object and occurrence. In film she is able to make a topic concrete in a way that would not be possible in sculpture or photography. She abandons any idea of plot in favour of a poetry of pure rhythm: *home sweet home* begins with a camera movement towards a door, slowly opening on an empty room. We hear footsteps on the wooden floor, the creaking of the door and a light breeze, gently moving the curtains. The room is empty. The camera focuses on the windows, through which falls the blue-white light of an unseen moon. Outside are trees thick with foliage. In the same constant rhythm the camera glides onward, swooping past a gold-framed picture hanging on the opposite wall. Unexpectedly, before we have turned full circle in the room, a blast of wind forces the door open. The title fades in and the red light of sunrise floods the room. Once again the camera moves along the windows and walls. Nothing has changed, but the emptiness seems a little less eerie in the warmer light. The last movement back towards the door is filmed slightly from above so that gradually we imagine that we have not been moving around a real room. This impression is strengthened by a scarcely perceptible asynchrony between picture and sound in the second part of the film. And indeed, the artist recorded the work with a "finger camera" inside a model, the floor plan of which measured just 50cm x 70cm. Despite the fact that the miniature room is just a constructed microcosm, the viewer is emotionally involved and experiences how the empty room becomes a representation of the vagueness of the past. Even if one comes to terms with the lack of a subject, as can sometimes be determined in the fragility of the finger camerawork, the steady slow tempo of the camera is relentless. It demands personal memories, which could be recalled, yet, at the same time, deprives them of any basis. Contrary to the suggestion in the title, *home sweet home* produces the uncomfortable feeling of a fruitless search.

Timm's latest installation, *The Moon as a Falling Apple (Mond als geworfener Apfel)*, on the other hand, places eventfulness in the centre of things and culminates in the picture of the jump as a moment of power between preparation, leap and fall. In the exhibition container Prima Kunst, which is docked at the Stadtgalerie Kiel, Timm has installed a 2.8-metre-long springboard, positioning it inside the container in such a way that spectators in the gallery look along the length of the board. The visitor's first impulse is to walk along the board, to test its potential energy and bounce up and down on it a few times. As children we all stood with wet, wrinkly feet on the rough surface of a diving board, high above both water and those expectant playmates who won't allow us to back out. We are in turmoil; we feel the desire to jump, the feeling of weightlessness and floating, yet we fear the dizzying fall and the explosiveness of the impact. But, as always in Thea Timm's work, it is not possible to actually physically experience the piece; everything must happen in the viewer's mind. Timm robs the springboard of its function by jamming two long pieces of wood between the surface of the springboard and the ceiling of the container. The pieces of wood place the board under such tension that its bottom end is raised up above the ground. To the right and left inside the container are four neon tubes which open up the sides of the room and detract from its boundaries. The sculpture is caught in this fragile balance of forces between the clearly discernible bending of the pieces of wood and the lifted bottom end of the springboard. Again, the picture of a diver is evoked, a diver in the moment when he leaps; his muscles tensed in concentration. He shoots up, overcoming gravity and describing an arch whose curvature is the same as that of the two pieces of wood which allude to an instant in time. Timm is not concerned with the moment of the leap or of the landing, but exclusively with the in-between moment of an imagined time of conquered physical forces, where gravity loses its effect and the body of the diver is weightless. Floating. The pieces of wood follow the trajectory of a fanned-out vectorial motion and sketch out a possibility of the impossible and a way to imagine the unimaginable.

The theme of jumping (and falling) as a physical act has constituted a genre of its own since the 1960s. We need only refer to Yves Klein's staged photograph "Leap into the Void" (1960), in which he is pictured suspended over a road with outstretched arms and his head raised, his body completely tensed. He stages his leap from a window as a symbol of crossing physical borders, as an incredible, all-powerful self-portrait which reformulates the question about the body's location, i.e. its spatial and temporal norms and restrictions. In most cultures the image of a jump provides metaphors for self-determination, courage and freedom, but also for the contrary, for hopelessness, suicide and the final plunge. But only those who do actually jump experience the space between take-off and landing. Whether flight or fall, escaping the earth's gravity, becoming light and floating, is the real thrill of jumping. In the realm of sport this thrill is coupled with performing a movement by employing

elegance and technical perfection in midair, supported and then catapulted into the sky by the springboard and its dynamic impulse.

Borrowing from Newton's reflections on gravity, the title of the installation *The Moon as a Falling Apple* also suspends meanings, explicitly stating what the piece is about. Its topic is that of all of Timm's oeuvre: thought patterns which revolve around transitory gaps in space, places between image and reality.

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All quotes from Thea Timm originated in a conversation with Johanna Domke in December 2006.

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