

This Exhibition Explores Dementia Through Sensations

by sleek team | 02.02.2016 |



Geta Bratescu „, Les Mains. Pentru ochi, mâna trupului meu îmi reconstituie portretul [The Hands. For the eye, the hand of my body reconstitutes my portrait] “ , 1977, Video Still, 8mmfilm transferred onto DVD, 4:3, 04:40 min, b/w Copyright the artist. Courtesy of the artist, Ivan Gallery, Bucharest and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin.

In one of the opening scenes of the film “Still Alice”, the protagonist goes on her regular jogging session only to panic halfway through for finding herself lost. Alice is in her fifties and can’t remember the running track she’s previously run countless times. The strange and familiar conflate in Alice’s world, in what signals the first of many disconcerting manifestations of Alzheimer’s.

insitu in Berlin have also tackled this delicate health issue with the group exhibition “Madeleine”, their third installment of a four-part series about fictional characters. After “[Vic](#)” which was dedicated to a wavering ambitious girl, and “[Jonny](#)” which followed a hedonistic libertine, “Madeleine” is a sobering counter-agent yet a brave and highly sensorial one.

Dealing with health matters in art, especially if the artist is not affected by it, can be very challenging and many steer away from it. Beyond the concerns regarding fair representation and the limits of artistic freedom, there's also the question of how to address a serious issue without being joyless.



Daniel Gustav Cramer "Tales 62 (Ericeira, Portugal, September 2011)" (2014), 2 framed Cprints, each 25 x 20 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf.

The seven-strong group of artists tackle the latter by completely transforming the gallery and turning it into a minefield of eerie sensations that gradually casts light on Madeleine's life with dementia. Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia and one in three of the population alive today are expected to develop the illness, two thirds of whom are women. Its symptoms vary but often deteriorate our memory, ability to focus, reasoning and visual perception.

As I walk down the stairs to enter the gallery space I am confronted with a wall that didn't use to be there, making me question whether I am in the right place after all. Doubt is one of the main symptoms of AD and the artists achieve its constant animation throughout the show, as well as making me confront further examples, often unexpectedly. And it doesn't take too long in fact. The involvement with Madeleine's life starts summarily with Franziska Furter's arresting work "Rime" (2005). Once I step on the carpeted grey floor, the comforting impact I expect is replaced by the disorienting gravel-like surface, which the artist accomplished by sweeping chunks of broken glass under the carpet.

The rest of the space was turned into a living room with sofas, TV and decoration, that simultaneously acts as a haunted house where uncanny things happen. Take for instance Tully Arnot's "Nervous Plant" (2016) which is a creepy shrub that jerks in response to light and shadow. The yellow post-its remind me along the way of customary tasks like turning devices off or warning me not to touch the radiator. These subtle yet curious encounters is what connect us to the plight of Madeleine by recreating surprise and discomfort in a homely setting. They may seem isolated occurrences but their sequence transports the viewer to a place of fear, delusion, paranoia and daze. And yet the playfulness accompanies the journey with added moments of poetry. Daniel Gustav Cramer illustrates time lapses of the memory in the dreamy photography series "Tales 63 (Ericeira, Portugal, September 2011)" (2014). In it, a boat floats on the sea but its sequence provides an unreliable time jump, or is it? Madeleine would surely ask herself. Further on, "Presence of Another Space. IV&V (Second Appearance)", Antonia Low's spooky curtains represent the windows that could have been there, or maybe are actually there, should I touch the artwork? It's confusing but that's the whole point.



Antonia Low „Der Verlorene Raum“ (2014), Kunstmuseum Bonn. Courtesy the artist.



Antonia Low „Der Verlorene Raum“ (2014), Detail, Kunstmuseum Bonn.
Courtesy the artist.



Image 05: Tully Arnot „Nervous Plant” (2016), artificial plant, microcontroller, servo motor, electronics, light sensor, dimensions variable Courtesy the artist. [Link to video](#)

Only one of the artists present is of age susceptible to developing AD – 90-year-old Geta Bratescu who contributes with her 1977 video “The Hands – For the eye, the hand of my body reconstitutes my portrait” which shows the artist’s hands performing repetitive expressions that could mimic lapses of the brain. In the same vein, in “Madeleine” the insitu team imitates without mocking, and informs without sanctimonious memos. Travelling through the show is like visiting our potential future; it’s an exercise of philosophy, in learning how to play the game of life until it eventually flashes “level complete”.

Text by [Will Furtado](#)

“Madeleine” is at [insitu Berlin](#) until 5 March 2016

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