

Behind the scene

Dutch artist Marike Schuurman works with photographs and videos that apparently document reality, but aim to be far more than simply a document. Rather, her images scratch the surface of daily reality, generating small fractures and irritants that unsettle the way we usually perceive the world around us. Exploring the medium of photography and its ability to capture reality while also displacing it, making it strange, Schuurman looks for this same ambivalence in the spaces that surround us, as a kind of mirror effect between media and locality.

This is the case, too, with her exhibition *Werbung [Advertising]*, which is on view in the art space Autocenter in Berlin through October 2006. Here, in an otherwise reduced show, Schuurman uses the large back wall of the former auto shop to blow up one photograph in a large-scale format, a dimension that in itself is unsettling. What first catches the eye when entering the space is thus this grainy, black and white surface, a bird's eye view of Ground Zero in New York. The image depicts the barely recognizable location and its neighbouring streets and housing blocks, but on a closer look, the incomprehensiveness that ties itself to every image of this scene gives way to other incomprehensions: How did the artist take this photo? Why is it framed by what seems to be a flaking wall?

The image (*WTC NYC 2006*), it turns out, is a reproduction of a reproduction, the photo of an aerial photo that was recently shown in a memorial exhibition at Ground Zero. With the memory of the media's countless images of the attacks as a backdrop, this overlapping of layers of reality and imagination mirrors motives and themes that can be found in the rest of Schuurman's exhibition, too. In many of the photographs, the artist presents reality as if staged without ever staging her motives. This goes especially for a series of photos of huge advertising banners covering buildings under renovation. It takes a close look to discover the fine lines of these tarpaulins, too, their *trompe-l'oeil* illusion. Sometimes the banners present the new facade of the building – draped on the scaffolding in a one-to-one scale – turning the city into a scenery, a projection surface and its own hollow double. On the posters with commercials, Schuurman takes this stage-like effect one step further. She captures adverts which are continually cut and

pasted to adapt to the construction process; whenever a new scaffold is put up before the main scaffolding, the hidden part of the image is substituted meticulously on a new tarpaulin. As when a third of a women's giant leg is replaced by a fragment of another leg: an almost surgical composition and visual statement that extends along the whole of a building (*Plot Bein*).

If Schuurman's mirror cabinet opens up layers of everyday life, challenging our perceptions and daily routines, it also inevitably raises questions about the use of public space. The seizure of space in the city was always a symbolic and concrete demonstration of power, and here, on the tarpaulins behind which the buildings are being refurbished for new investments, the power of global finance displays itself. In Schuurman's work, this power seems not least the power to pervade fantasy and reality, to edit the physical surroundings into a kind of real-life Photoshop.

Berlin 2006

© Anne Ethelberg