

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cross Female - Metaphors of the Female in the Art of the 90's

Kunstlerhaus Bethanien
Mariannenplatz 2
10997 Berlin

30 September - 29 October 2000
Wednesday - Saturday 2:00-8:00pm

www.crossfemale.de

The thematic exhibition cross female, financed through the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin, opens at the Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin September 30, 2000. 30 international artists will show their recent works on the cultural representation of the female. The exhibition investigates the metaphors of the female with regard to the increasing significance of the new media and technology which seem to blur the borderlines of gender.

Invited Artists

Jenny Althoff (USA)
Ghada Amer (F/USA)
Manuela Barth (D)
Claudine Brignot (D)
Daniele Buetti (USA)
Patty Chang (USA)
Margarete Dreher (D)
Alba d'Urbano (D)
Åsa Elzén (S)
Ankie Feuchtenberger (D)
Kirsten Geisler (NL)
Antje Heinemann (D)
Lynn Hershmann (USA)
Rinaldo Hopf (D)
Gabrielle Jennings (USA)
Zoe Leonard (USA)
Natache Lesueur/Bruno Pelassy (F)
Lotte Konow Lund (N)
Regina Möller (D)
LGX Lillian Mousli (D/USA)
Victorine Müller (CH)
Hajnal Németh (HU)
Ilona Németh (SK)
Maya Rikli (CH)

Sam Samore (USA)
Elsa Schindler (D)
Gertrud Schrader (D)
Old Boys' Network / Cornelia Sollfrank (D)
Josephine Starrs/Leon Smielewski (AUS)/VNS Matrix (AUS)

The Metaphors of the Female in the Art of the 90s

The latest discussions in gender studies are central to our ideas: the body as the basis of sexual identity is dissolving, gender is described as constructed and an artifact. In the same way as the body does not seem to be carrying truth any longer, the category of the female has become uncertain. As a discursive construction, the female has received multiple significance and we encounter these as incorporations or metaphors of the female. At the same time as the female category becomes uncertain the polar structure of the relationship between genders is shifting. The duality of male and female, nature and culture, body and mind is being questioned. The thesis of the discursivity of the body and gender has influenced the discussions over the last couple years. It can be found not only in debates within and on the new media but also in numerous social discussions on fashion, lifestyle and publicity. The art of the 90s portrays an intense discourse with the artifact of the "body".

The exhibition cross female questions the images of the female within different social contexts. The main topics are the relationship between art, publicity, fashion and the new media with regard to the production of the images of the female.

Gabrielle Jennings' video "The Kiss" (1996), for instance, deals with the production of the images of gender in the area of publicity and reveals these as products of painful work. The protagonists contort their bodies in order to imitate the poses of perfume advertisements. Alba d'Urbano's project "Il sarto immortale" thematises the relationship between the body, its images and technology with reference to haute-couture and the various operations involved with it. Her project consists of a series of events, performances and installations. The divisions, the cutting, measuring and re-connecting of the images of the body in dressmaking (the superficial layers of the self) are integrated into the project and comment on systems of fashion. The relationship between fashion and femininity are subject to the work of the French artist Natacha Lesueur. The theme of the decoration of the female body is represented in inscriptions onto the skin. Her series of photographs (1995/96) show fragments of the bodies of young girls through the lens of the

camera which bear ornamental impressions of items such as fabrics. Thus, the body functions as a projection space for images (which also refer to common practices of body ornamentation such as tattooing and piercing) and becomes a coded place.

The new media and new technologies promise the dematerialization and liberalization of the body - one of the central questions of our exhibition. The user of the internet can shift angelic-like from identity to identity within a world beyond the body and gender. Numerous debates on and within the new media have commented on this fact. The exhibition seeks to find an answer to the question whether the cultural traditions of gender are dated in the age of the new media or whether the stereotypes of gender have simply been relaunched in a different format. On the one hand, the cyber-theorist Sadie Plant declares the net (in analogy to weaving) to a place of truly female origin. On the other hand, the Australian women artists VNS-Matrix try to subversively undermine the internet which they consider exclusively male. Their computer game "All New Gen" is a parody of the exaggerated female clichés of the world of video and computer games: eroticized ideals of femininity such as Lara Croft mutate into Patina de Panties, Dentata and the Princess of Slime.

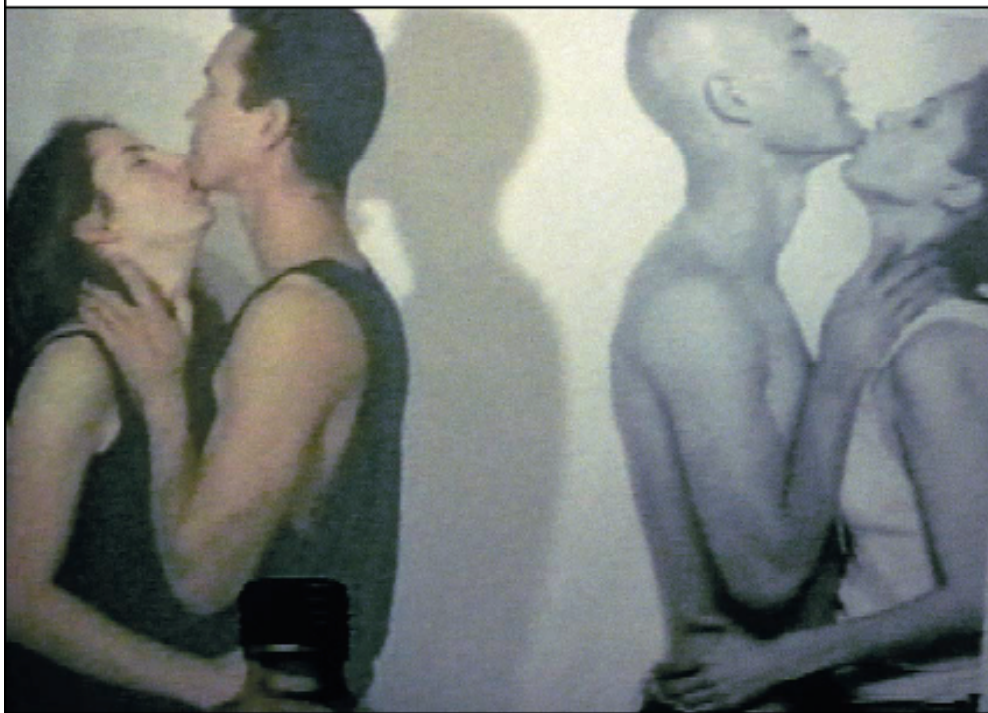
The Exhibition as a Work Space

The project cross female is designed as a processual exhibition. Within the medium of the exhibition it seeks to bring together and reflect on artistic strategies, theoretical positions and social practice. The actual "work on the exhibition" should be carried on continuously during the exhibition by interventions into it and interaction with it. A collection of material from areas such as publicity, fashion and lifestyle will be accessible to the audience in the form of texts, films and videos. Two thematical evenings with performances, discussions and lectures will be offered to intensify the critical discourse with the contents of the exhibition.

Art does not work as an illustration of theoretical concepts but becomes visible as one material next to many others. This project does not present the collection of pieces of art within the framework of a theme in the context of a museum. It reflects on the production and on the transport of the theme into aesthetical form.

> Gabrielle Jennings

geb. 1966 in
San Francisco,
USA,
lebt und arbeitet
in Los Angeles



The Kiss, 1996
Video Still

Gabrielle Jennings Videoarbeit „The Kiss“ rezipiert den Herstellungsprozess von Geschlechterbildern in der Werbung und entlarvt diese Bilder in ihrem Zitat als Produkt mühsamer Arbeit. In der Anstrengung, Posen der Parfumwerbung à la Calvin Klein nachzustellen, verrenken sich die Protagonistinnen bis zur Schmerzgrenze.

Gabrielle Jennings video piece "The Kiss" imitates the production process of gender pictures in advertizing, and in her quote reveals these pictures as the product of strenuous work. Straining to recreate poses in perfume advertizing à la Calvin Klein, the protagonists contort themselves until they reach the pain barrier.

Cross Female: Metaphors of the Female in the Art of the 90's
Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2000
Kunst-Und Kunstgewerbeverein, Pforzheim, 2001

Exerpts from the exhibition catalogue in regards to "The Kiss":

"... a direct reference to advertising, fashion and the appropriation of their modes of expression is found for example in the work of Gabrielle Jennings..."

-by Barbara Höffer and Valeria Schulte-Fischedick
from the essay 'cross female... cross'

"In the video still "The Kiss", Gabrielle Jennings makes it clear that the desired beauty of the pose or expression is connected to pain. Her "living pictures", which imitate perfume advertising in the printed media, employ the use of mimesis to expose the strain of the romantic pose, which is sold as an ideal. In looking for the perfect photographic moment, the ad photographer obviously contorted the models to the ultimate limit. Gabrielle Jennings shows something that almost every woman can relate to: that the attempt to adapt the clichés of advertising aesthetics to real life is a painful process."

-by Jessica Ullrich
from the essay 'Shifting Femaleness between Exteriority and Interiority'