

G E O R G K A R G L

Elke Krystufek - NEEDS

GEORG KARGL, Vienna

26 March to 15 May 2004

Look me in the eye and if you see familiarity then celebrate the contraction! The Viennese Elke Krystufek does not really need to be introduced in more detail in her home country: her private life that determines the artist life and vice versa is too well known, too public for that. The self is her drive, her desire, her good fortune and her curse at the same time, a self-awareness demonstrating her own personality in offensive publicity. We all know this phenomenon within mass media popular statements from stars for a few minutes, helpless attempts to bring the consumers into an apparent proximity with the idols through an openness of body language.

Fear, let's talk about it. It is a completely different case with Elke Krystufek, whose manifold, multimedia work is located in diverse contexts: performance, techniques of agency and staging, the self-portrait as a "mirror of the soul", feminist, gender-specific modes of behavior and action, the construction of femininity, the investigation of mechanisms of appropriation, music and fashion. The gaze as the paradigmatic vehicle for fears, wishes, joys, pleasures, desires and embarrassment always inscribes us or others for ourselves or our counterpart. For Krystufek, the self is the icon, a glorification and a questioning of the ego, a desired interaction as communication about the problem of being different. What we are and who we are is ultimately not determined by us, but by an astonishing number of parameters that are not in our hands.

I will fight for the right to live in freedom! The exhibition NEEDS shows paintings for the first time, in which the painter is no longer the main protagonist. Although she is still present naked in the two that chronologically come first, in the other pictures – all of them have the same format of 2 x 3 meters – other persons are monumentally in the foreground. They show portraits from pictures mostly from the 18th and 19th century, by Dutch artists, Pre-Raphaelites and others: Jesus and Mary, Madame Ferrand meditating on Newton, Madame Recamier by Gerard or Madame Riviere by Ingres; there are also writers and musicians from the last century: Rimbaud, Brel, Cohen or Cat Stevens, and even her mother and an anonymous yogi in a difficult position. It is all about difficult positions, because although the protagonists are all applied to a very thin and gesturally white ground and evince the same Krystufekian style devices, we experience them as being present, as counterparts suddenly looking or demanding. Although a relatively delicate incarnation predominates, one also senses the strength of expression in

S C H L E I F M Ü H L G A S S E 5 1 0 4 0 W I E N
T E L (1) 5 8 5 4 1 9 9 F A X (1) 5 8 5 4 1 9 9 9

all the faces, painterly aggression or frustration resonating in them at the same time. Women's portraits of men, which are nevertheless all portraits of a female painter, and in which much femininity seems to develop as a physical coupling with the male dominant position.

"Egofugality" is nothing less than an evolutionary proposal, according to Krystufek ... With Krystufek, the idol is the icon of the self, the glorification and questioning of the ego, where a desired interaction as communication represents an interpassivity that especially characterizes the mass media. On the other hand, the articles of clothing designed by Krystufek are related to a life plan that succinctly happens through the body and its surface. By designing clothes herself, they also stand for self-design and self-expression as an expression, which, exclusive and expensive, resists everything off-the-shelf. The moral question of the production conditions, certain expectations regarding functionality and aesthetics, the general use of and need for clothing also determine the appearance, optical effect and use of these very material self-portraits not only defined by art works that can be undone.

The case is similar with the use of furniture and here the chair from her old flat, where she painted the backs and seats in the style of Sue Williams, Muntean/Rosenblum, Lisa Ruyter and Karen Kilmnik, as though the absence of the person could be magically reverted through the empty chair iconographically with their painting style. As a pole between these groups, there is a fourth series, for which she created six paintings that stem from her guest professorship in Linz last year, when Krystufek appeared six times in different outfits and masquerades. These getups as Drag Queen and Drag King, older woman or punk were staged as a kind of dramaturgy for various acts for her students and performatively celebrated.

She's given up talking, don't say a word. The portraits of other (bourgeois (painters')) persons' individual free spirit as disintegration in excess, the self-designed identity as an authentic replica of one's own designed image, through fashion models with bits of canvas attached as an assurance of the self, and the pieces of furniture painted in colleagues' styles as placeholders for desire and emptiness, as well as the numerous nonsensical text quotations woven in everywhere or providing a frame – sometimes like cutting patterns – all provide the questionable *I* as the other with nourishment. In the same way, the performance planned for the opening evening, where about twenty-five people will wear her clothes, represents a costume ball, a catwalk among like-minded people using the method to question the structure. How wonderful the old yoga saying sounds, placed there by the side of Cat Stevens, who converted to Islam: *Be happy with what you have in life.* It's just hard to find out what that is, really having!

Gregor Jansen