

Filling the void

Text accompanying the performance *You sexy thing, you* by Anke Armandi

In the performative installation *You sexy thing, you* Anke Armandi traces the origins of her own artist's biography and weaves present, past and future into a multilayered narrative. She questions the influence of determination and of the patriarchal conditioning of adolescence, often passed on by women themselves; she reflects on feminine self-assertion and how transgenerational viewpoints and behavioural patterns are passed on or broken.

You sexy thing, you is a work in progress in three acts. In act one Anke Armandi reflects on her own youth and explores the symbolic meaning of a spatial and mental void, which is both inspiring and restricting. Act two is dedicated to the reconstruction of her mother's teenage bedroom, in which the artist leads a fictional dialogue with her. Finally, in act three, through the revelation of young people's perspectives, the focus shifts to the next generation - that of her daughter, known as *Gen Z*. The combination of autobiographical fragments, performative reflection and multi-media elements creates a space full of possibilities, a dialogue between tradition and awakening, between that which has been and that, which can yet become.

Anke Armandi analyses the image of women within a historical framework, focusing on four generations between 1910 and 2010. One significant scene illustrates the image of women within the context of generational shifts: the grandmother insistently warns the granddaughter of the disadvantages of being a housewife, whereas the great-granddaughter idealises that way of life and would like nothing more. The contrast between these two scenes points to changing social role models and the transformation of individual identities within female biographies. By means of her own family history, Anke Armandi researches how women move within patriarchal structures, which behavioural patterns they subconsciously take on and pass on to the next generation, but also how resistance develops. Especially in her teenage room, a space in which self-empowerment and self-exploration become evident as dynamic processes begins manifesting itself out of the void: as a struggle with traditional roles, but also as a possibility to find oneself, to 're-locate' oneself and to create new stories.

Act one of *You sexy thing, you* was first shown on 17th January 2025 at IntAkt Gallery. The performance's set design gives the audience a glimpse of the protagonist's teenage bedroom, in which the afore mentioned void becomes visible and physical objects are combined with a 280x416cm watercolour painting, creating an optical illusion. In the painting as well as in the projection the artist plays with different layers, overlaps and crossfades, through which

blank spaces are created. This aspect of layering also comes into effect in the text and the performance. Whilst on first glance an unimportant location, the narrow space between door and wardrobe becomes the central scene within the painting. It is here, within the performance, that the artist projects fragile recollections: grandmother's kitchen table, her own Sunday best, her father's study. The longer one observes the performance, the clearer it becomes, that this is indeed a void, an ambivalent space between threat and freedom, limitation and change. This space stands for everything that was not allowed to be said, and at the same time it is a creative retreat in which Anke Armandi was able to invent herself.

Text by Paula Marschalek

Filling the void

Text accompanying the performance *You sexy thing, you* by Anke Armandi

The floor is covered with a purple carpet on which various original objects from the artist's youth are strewn out: clothing, a diary, Mickey Mouse comics, stuffed animals, cassette tapes and gummi bears. Colourful reflections, probably from a disco ball or fairy lights, dance across the scenery and amplify the surreal character of the image. The stage set shows a painted, open wardrobe, in which hang four select items of clothing. From left to right, representing the father, a comfortable dressing gown, for the mother an expensive fur coat, for the brother a slick suit and for Anke Armandi a red graduation dress, which the artist previously used in 2000 as motif in works made at the Academy of Fine Arts. It is striking, that the first three of these items of clothing are hung in a row, whilst the dress is facing the other way and is positioned slightly apart. Hereby the clothing provides hints on family status and relationship dynamics.

The shelf above is literally overflowing with objects representing the Eighties. They are relicts of a bygone era, keepers of personal memories, expressions of fashion and identity. In between the different objects a screaming mouse can be found – a seemingly inconspicuous detail that then reveals itself as a powerful symbol. It stands for the protagonist's political opinions such as independent critical thinking, which were unwelcome during her childhood. It stands for the fear of not being heard, for the necessity to diminish herself, while the urge for creative expression and resistance was already growing within her. The painting is rich in details and contains several hidden clues and personal narratives. On the right, the wardrobe door is left slightly ajar, offering a glimpse of the mysterious and the hidden. One can just make out the song lyrics to *You sexy thing, you* by the British soul band Hot Chocolate, which is not only interwoven

with the artist's first amorous fantasies of her teenage years, but also with the profound feeling of finally being seen and understood.

This artistic, interdisciplinary examination opens up a space for reflection. Through the projections of memories and the symbolic filling of the void, Anke Armandi gives voice to the untold stories. Not only does she question social norms, but she paves the way for a fresh start, in which old patterns are shattered, and new narratives are created. Through the deliberate use of contradictions, the artist strives to create an atmosphere of lightness and a subtle form of self-irony and humour.

The performance thereby becomes a powerful act of self-empowerment, which allows the audience to question and transform their own history. Here, feminism is not purely debated as a political discourse, but as lived experience. The performance enables us to understand how identity and authenticity are shaped, held in suspense between past and future, between heteronomy and autonomy. By interweaving personal and collective memories, Anke Armandi opens a multi-layered reflection on femininity, on the power of transformation and the question, how healing and liberation within family and social structures can be possible.

Text by Paula Marschalek