Getting happily dizzy

Essay for catalogue "Karina Nimmerfall: Diamonds on Velvet", Vienna 2004

By Stella Rollig

Karina Nimmerfall's installations are elaborate, artistic amusement parks for people who enjoy the „discourse" and have a weakness for elegance: Guilt-free pleasures, indulgence without remorse. This is by no means meant to be as disrespectful, as it sounds at first. On the contrary, it is an homage. Dry theoretical analysis and brainy descriptions might prevent the interested, especially those who like to approach art *a priori* through their readings, from physically experiencing the real artistic work. A word to such people in advance: Karina Nimmerfall's work is more pleasurable and more beautiful than its description tends to convey, and just as intelligent.

If the installations give rise to a tongue in cheek comparison with "magic houses" in the realm of amusement park architecture, then we can refer to Nimmerfall's videos as a heavy dose of the pure stuff for film junkies. They are like a straight shot poured from the distilled essence of the substance that makes it so marvelous to watch movies. Because the installations are conceptually sophisticated and deliberately presented, it is easy to get stuck in the process of talking about them and overlook an empirical fact: its fun to sensually and mentally experience and decipher the work.

Nimmerfall's own enlightening explanations of the abstract concepts and the technical construction arise form the work's origins in the analysis of architecture, film and the culture of images. Because of this, we'll take another track. In "Luna Park", an amusement facility patterned after pre-industrial entertainment, "magic houses" and mirrored mazes are a part of the basic repertoire. They are pleasurable because they transport us to an early childhood, which is not accessible by conscious memory. In these distorted, off-balanced rooms one experiences the possibility of body memory. The body relives direct sensations and re-experiences the gratification gained by physically conquering a spatial situation and grasping it mentally.

Nimmerfall structures the exhibition space by constructing walls to form corners, corridors, and chambers. They cite stage design or film sets, because they never disguise their intended purpose as scenery for illusions. The constructed architecture is crossed with the virtual space in the projections. In turn the subjects of the projected images are rooms (photographed) and therefore, change perspective into medial reality. A direct examination of the synaesthetic experience of real and virtual spatial situations and dimensions takes place. In contrast to the abundance in contemporary video-installations, Nimmerfall uses digital photography. She selects rooms, which originate in the iconography of the modern and which re-evoke their inherent, redemptive promise: so clear, so orderly, so free of ballast – that must be successful living. Occasionally, animated details in the static photographs provide additional appeal: a fire is flickering in the hearth, or a cactus gently sways in the desert light.

What's more, Nimmerfall spins a web of reflection over the staged architecture. She reflects on the translation of real interiors, houses and locations into images, which are constructed so they can be presented in the media (in film) or similarly represented (in home magazines and architectural publications).

The rooms (re)produced here are nonexistent; even if they do actually exist somewhere – they are as real as the night sky Hollywood edits into its films, or the dark parking lot and the house beneath the trees in Nimmerfall's short videos. The videos are comprised of a single shot: apparently various film sets. At first glance they promise the loveliest, most exciting stories. But wait… Nimmerfall simply filmed these conventional Hollywood establishing shots in her own neighborhood in Los Angeles – lessons in the theory of simulation as a most amusing confusion. The film that follows is brought to you by the artist, even if you have to make it yourself.