

Kunstverein Grafschaft Bentheim
Hauptstraße 37
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Daniela Kneip Velescu
Vampire Facelift
March 10 – May 12, 2024

Geheimsache Kanal

I feel a little uneasy as this contrite full moon stares back at me. With the due seriousness of a proper Fraktur font, we are invited to the *Vampire Facelift* at the *Kunstverein Grafschaft Bentheim*. Here, it's actually a method for fighting wrinkles with countless injections of previously extracted and processed blood plasma back into the original body. The press release for Daniela's last exhibition *Hyaluron*, somewhat roughly stated that the artist already had »a few wrinkles«. Now she seems to want to resort to more drastic measures. Recently she demolished the house of her own identity amid joyful laughter. On the ruins of self-awareness now rests this artistic showcase spanning multiple disciplines.

I chose the most humorous version (˘) _/`

Let's first get an overview of the aesthetic battle raging before us. The high-gloss exhibition film is suitable for this purpose. A large, bright sofa, a globe, and a – covered with plastic film to protect against dust – »American Psycho telescope«. The loft here shamelessly tells the story of her rise, while Daniela, with cheerful gestures, explains the background of a piece of work that is not even visible in the current exhibition. Casually she shows her flat stomach, and this cactus mimicry next to the screen extends the living room into the exhibition space. Something is definitely not right here.

Piles of letter trays tower behind us, emitting a strangely urban aura in their constellations. The similarity to the currently stalled construction projects from Shanghai to Berlin is unmistakable. Their floors are inhabited by all sorts of personal items left behind by past residents. At ground level, strange creatures move across a bureaucratic game board in the DIN grid. Is the installation *Gliedertaxe (Limb tax)* now a cruel game of *Snakes and ladders* or a spread-out enjoyable *Migration quartet* of the bulky size of an overseas shipping container? In any case, the prices for a hand should not be underestimated – by the way, no one offers disability insurance for artists anymore. And belonging to that professional group in Germany is still determined by the tax office. For sure, the required »certain artistic level« has been met here.

Last year, with the support of the *Stiftung Kunstfonds Bonn*, Daniela traveled to the hometown of her mother, Satchinez. She followed the historical migration route, on which her ancestors set off 250 years ago with almost nothing but hope for a better life from the not yet founded Germany on the still wild Danube into the Pannonian Plain. Today, the environment of the river upstream is known as the *Balkan route*. Grouchily, the Danube Swabian motto now joins us in the room:

Death to the first, hardship to the second, bread to the third.

The forefathers used one-way ships, so-called *Ulmer Schachteln*, for their hair-raising journey downstream. Such a boat must of course not be missing in the exhibition. Rising didactic strictness, however, crumbles immediately through Daniela's slyly embedding of the respective presentation monitor in the coffee table. Today, the

Danube is domesticated, often used for riverboat cruises. Daniela succumbed to participating in such an excursion. In the rhythm of full-board, including seating arrangements and buffet, it went on. When the cruise manager had one bottle of wine but two glasses, brought to her room, she temporarily suspended the participating observation. The sailors were much more appealing.

persoană normală, muncitor calificat și cadre universitare

Count Dracula, perhaps the most famous »Romanian«, is a processing of the national figure *Vlad Țepeș*, the Voivode of Wallachia, the birthplace of the artist. For the schoolchild, it was balm for the soul back then to finally have a »krass« reference to her foreign »motherland« in her back pocket, just in case there were any questions. That the *Vampire Facelift* is named after this person, who is primarily known for his penchant for impalement, is quite perfidious. The high art here was to leave vital organs as undamaged as possible to ensure prolonged suffering before death. Fortunately, Daniela doesn't present us with such horror stories now that she has our attention. By now, she no longer sees being born in Bucharest as a stigma. This fact can also be funny for her, not just for others! With *the ransom of the Romanian Germans* (also called: *Geheimsache Kanal*), Daniela and her parents landed in West Germany even before the Iron Curtain was lifted, all thanks to the geopolitical tides. They immediately received corresponding passports and a small welcome allowance. Her art studies were probably not planned. In the installation *Gliedertaxe*, the entry permit of the nuclear family Kneip-Velescu should still be found – it also certifies the »German ethnicity«.

Abs, Butt and Thigh is a lie

The second sofa in this exhibition, made of black worn leather, now stands right in front of us. However, it would be too much of a joke if this two-seater had also come to Germany on the Danube once upon a time – but: Indications suggest that this now lovingly run-down by two generations, mimicry of a design classic, as was customary at IKEA back then, was manufactured in Romania. Daniela has added the missing exoskeleton for us. As a child, she always wanted a »real« coffee table instead of her parents' crate standing on wedges with the inscription »Fragile«. *Shabby-chic* is still not her thing. And by the way, Daniela doesn't even live in the loft with the light sofa, mentioned at the beginning. She only used the camera crew that had been commissioned by third parties to record an interview with her. She asked a wealthy friend if she could shoot at her home – both had a great time. Neither the film crew nor their contracting authority know that they were producing Daniela's little scripted reality show on that particular afternoon.

Dany's Dream Collection

now brings us back down to earth. The logo of the job center, formerly known as the *Arbeitsamt*, has sneaked in next to that of *Adobe*, the largest provider of media production and editing software. Even if the meaning of »Starting a family as a life plan« has been lost on her. It feels like I'm standing here together with these pictures in the strangely overextended parents' room to get chewed out. If the private is political, then can't art sometimes become private to be political? In the end, we are all unemployed. This exhibition is not cuddly art! Thanks to her chutzpah, she stubbornly defies every serious context with a gritted smile.

Behind me, a spacious but not too flashy television displays vacation movies. Occasionally Daniela ghosts around in a reflection through the *Traumfänger*. With great sensitivity, the visual journey in the glass elevator along the most important waterway in Southeast Europe keeps the gaze always directed outward. Rumour has it that the motif of the exhibition invitation is already on its way to a techno club as a sticker to cover all camera lenses. *Vampire Facelift* is not a ghost story of migration but a vehicle that allows us to grow beyond our present circumstances in a self-determined manner. We can only free ourselves.