

nicola von senger

Galerie Nicola von Senger is pleased to present the exhibition *L'Ecole des Caresses II* from Dutch artist Madeleine Berkhemer (*1973 Bergen op Zoom, lives and works in Rotterdam). The exhibition contains various new sculptures and three large format drawings.

Berkhemer dedicates herself primarily to the examination of social processes from a sexual point of view. To this end she not only studies art historical and literary texts, but may also attend shootings with erotic photographers for contact, porn, and fetish magazines. She takes on the parts of three alter egos, Milly, Molly, and Mandy, who are set to seek out and indulge in the pleasures the world has to offer. In a decidedly post-feminist manner, the artist thus sidles through the domains of sexuality as a social phenomenon, as a search for identity, and as a question of control. Social standards and realities relating to the politics of power are subverted and tested with identities that profit from the freedom of fiction, yet are firmly rooted in personal experience.

Berkhemer's art is a process that turns out works which make use of various materials as well as her own body. As a trained fashion designer, her professional relationship to the body has been strong from the beginning. The ambivalent reciprocity between seeing and being seen, between appropriation and production, also has an important function in fashion and carries over into her work as an artist - especially in photography and performance. Her drawings in this exhibition, which are inspired by an illustrated volume on fetishism from the 1920's, *L'Ecole des Caresses*, similarly take a closer look at the body and desire as the first instances of social order. The relationship to fetishism plays an important part in this order, whereby the topic is treated in a playful manner that presents an *Ecole des Caresses* based on innocent curiosity rather than perversion - as long as the allure of the innocent does not clash with the politics of power (of the spectator).

The same elements factor into Berkhemer's sculptural work, where her choice of material is of some significance, and which derives aspects of its formal approach from Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. She works mainly with pantyhose, which is knotted, stretched, and interwoven into "hanging sculptures" that vary in form from threatening spiderwebs to cut diamonds. The material also lends an erotic female connotation to her standing sculptures, which, according to form, may be harmonic or dissonant. To be seduced by Berkhemer's work bears in it the joy of discovery as well as the guilt of voyeurism - both of which we gladly accept.

Gregor Staiger, December 2006

For further information and images please contact the gallery:
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