

Mika Taanila | Action Films

30 April to 28 May, 2016

Vernissage: April 29

Action Films is the first solo show of Finnish artist/filmmaker Mika Taanila in Basel. It brings together works that thematically revolve around issues of skipping memory, mis-remembering, fragmented brain and associative action painting. The common link between all works at Action Films is VHS (Video Home System). In a way one could also talk about (tender) domestic violence. The exhibition includes several video installations and works of different media of production and representation.

Black & White Movies (2013) is a series of 16 photogrammes, to be displayed in its entirety for the first time. These “photographs without a camera” are based on black & white movies from 1924-1995, recorded on VHS home video cassettes, which the artist has collected over the years and then destroyed with specific plot-oriented methods. The residues of the destroyed tapes are making up the photogrammes; they are arranged in a photographic darkroom on photosensitive material and finally shown as (framed) digital pigment prints.

The series makes up an imaginary memory game, unrelated to the visitor's familiarity with the movies. For example, the film “Kiss Me Deadly” ends with an explosion. To imitate/emulate the “method of destruction,” Taanila exploded the tape with conventional consumer fireworks during New Year's Eve in Helsinki. A flamethrower was used as method of destruction for the VHS cassette of *Roma, città aperta*, which was designed to parallel the torture methods of the Gestapo commanders in the film. In *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* Varla (Tura Satana) kills a man with her bare hands and feet; therefore, “I destroyed that tape “painfully with my own hands without any tools,” Taanila says.

Selections of the of *Black & White Movies* have been on show at CAM St. Louis (2013), de Gouvernestraat in Rotterdam (2014), Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki (2013/14) and Hämeenlinna Art Museum in Finland (2015/16).

One of the cassettes in the series is the French-Italian horror movie *Les yeux sans visage* (Eyes without a Face) directed by Georges Franju in 1960. “According to what I could remember from the film, I destroyed my own tape containing that film with chloroform, sulphuric acid, knives and finally, fire. Showing this photogram print in my solo show in St. Louis led into a surprising, bizarre and very fortunate chain of events and correspondence with the next-door neighbor of the film's young star actress, Edith Scob. As a result, Mrs. Scob – now living in Paris – was kind enough to donate to me the last remains of her once-large VHS collection,” tells Taanila. The two-screen video meditation *Tapes without Eyes* is based on these “Scob-tapes” and are now shown for the first time.

The single-channel video and sound installation *My Silence* is a structuralist, reductionist and conceptual piece. It experiments with what happens when the most important element from a specific film is taken out. Louis Malle's feature film *My Dinner with André* (1981) is a canonized classic in cinema history, a film noted most of all for its brilliant, multi-layered dialogue/monologue.

Taanila re-edited the film without any qualitative preferences, systematically deleting all scenes featuring spoken words on the soundtrack. What remains is the light, the camera movements, the gestures, the body language, the chemistry, the background noise, the silence... total cinema, as opposed to more theatrical, spoken cinema.

balzer projects

The single-channel video installation *Verbranntes Land* is a no-budget music promo clip commissioned by the Finnish band Kiila and based on an instructional Scotch videotape. "The passage of time wipes out electromagnetic data flows on VHS tape: this gradual decay is a painful reminder of my own inevitable ageing. I am no longer able to remember names, places and numbers as well as I once did. The piece is a metaphor for memory processes: a seven-minute sweet and tender brain scan," says Taanila.

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