

Theatre of Life

Life, life itself ... is the absolute art!

Centre of Contemporary Art Torun
exhibition catalogue transcript

Malin Ståhl's performative practice grew out of her interest in the history of performance and some of its main female protagonists, such as Yoko Ono, Marina Abramović or VALIE EXPORT. While still a student, she realised re-enactments of topical works, such as *Cut Piece* or *Instructions* of Yoko Ono, and this orientation towards re-visiting historical works brought her to the realisation of a number of performative, photographic and video works, texts and drawings in which art-history references and personal fantasies are overlapped. Her output seems to be an enchanted world of enigmatic characters and cross-gender personas, all skillfully choreographed in vaguely surreal stories set in beautiful natural landscapes. Behind this, in Michail Bakhtin's words, carnivalesque world, one can find Malin Ståhl's analytical approach towards inner structures of theatrical performance and issues connected with womanhood and gender. For Malin, the history of feminist performance becomes a "tool-box" out of which her new alter-egos, imaginary personas and their costumes can be created. So behind the heroine of her *Walking Cinema* there is VALIE EXPORT's *Touch Cinema* and Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0*: two actions in which artists challenged their audience to cross the line that was keeping them in the realm of the passive observers and touch, or actually act upon, their bodies. With a closer look, Malin Ståhl refers especially to those works in which artists were still and apparently passive. When one sees such works as Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* which she performed as her "Marilyn-Clown" alter-ego or the two mentioned above, it becomes obvious her practice is predominantly about inaction as performative state. The work *Finishing School; Karyatid* performed for this exhibition potentialities the condition for apparent stillness and lack of expressive action even more. The artist is engaged standing on a low column with a pile of books on her head and in a rare and occasional gesture of placing oversized paper lips over her own. In this refined and stylized way she creates a sort of dramatical suspension, in which she incarnates and at the same time mocks the idea of the ideal woman: pretty and passive.

Dobriła Denegri