

Christine Berndt
Opera Sculpture "Dorle"

Taking the former watch tower in the "Schlesischer Busch" in Berlin Treptow-Koepenick as the medium, the artist Christine Berndt developed the opera sculpture "Dorle". The project, in conjunction with the composer Helmut Oehring and the singer Natalia Pschenitschnikowa, came to life staging GDR history as a conjunction of documentary, contemporary music and architectural intervention. Starting point is the watch tower as a relic and architectural witness of the GDR regime. It forms the framework for the biography of "Dorle", a woman whose family history paradigmatically retells German history.

The multimedia exhibition refers to "Dorle's" life on three levels and in this way follows the given vertical structure and architecture of the watch tower: On the first floor the video installation "Propaganda" with excerpts from the German Wochenschau, newsreel broadcasts, in the time between 1942 to 1945 refers to the Second World War, which "Dorle's" father, a general in the German Wehrmacht experienced in Stalingrad. This is the backdrop to "Dorle's" family history. Although these years are shaped by the war, the choice is restricted to everyday and seemingly insignificant occurrences which by being staged in a rather propagandist manner are just as much part of the collective subconscious or awareness as are the representative pictures and images of war of that time. – On the second windowless floor a surrounding text encircles the visitor. This represents excerpts from "Dorle's" diary which tell of "Dorle's" attempted escape from the GDR, her following imprisonment and lastly her position as an unofficial employee of the Stasi. The visitor is included in this torturing self assessment and self questioning, which "Dorle" conducts after the demise of the GDR and until her death with increasing intensity. – The so called Freiwache, an open space, on the top floor is filled with the mono song of "Dorle". The libretto lasting 20 minutes, a composition by Helmut Oehring, varies excerpts from the diaries. By transposing these diary excerpts into song, Natalia Pschentschnikowa, "Dorle's" conflict is brought into our awareness and attains present significance. In this tripartite installation, this is the element with the most immediate impact on the viewer. The composition will be performed live only once to celebrate the opening of the exhibition.

On the evening of May 6th 2008 the watch tower turned into a closed shell which was enclosed by the singer and the instrumentalist in place of "Dorle". Four surveillance cameras recorded the happening inside the building and project the solo performance onto the outer layer of the building while the instrument and the voice were transmitted to the outside via amplifiers, through the illumination of the projectors and the emerging instrumental and voice the outer walls of the watch tower dissolved. The well fortified tower underwent a temporary metamorphosis into a transparent sculpture. Only after the performance the visitors permitted the opportunity to dive into the stillness of the tower with its silent projections on the first and second floor. During the next four weeks the multimedia-based installation including the tape from the live-recording of the performance was available to visitors.

The fates, destinies and biographies of people form the centre piece of Christine Berndt's artistic interest. Her works often illustrated by documentary media, open an access to the person portrayed, keeping the balance between empathetic approximation and critical distance. Also "Dorle's" story is told by Christine Berndt in an artistic way. A story, relying on true facts, that is formed by existential crises and blows of fate, which shows of the struggle between support and endurance. At the point of convergence between architecture, music, performance and documentation the opera sculpture "Dorle" is an experimental approximation to a biography in the conflict of individual fate and collective history. The questions that are raised contribute to the current debate about the former GDR and the dealing with this past.

As a special request and to protect immediate family "Dorle's" true identity remains hidden, the actual message of this performance, a public staging of an inner conflict, is not disturbed by this. As a temporary intrusion of public space this opera sculpture "Dorle" also seeks to draw attention to the continuous concealment of personal entanglements in injustice in Germany's recent past.

Opera sculpture „Dorle“

by Christine Berndt

in conjunction with Helmut Oehring (composition), Natalia Pschenitschnikowa (vocals/recorder), and Torsten Ottersberg (GOGH sound production)

First Release & Opening: May, 6th, 9 p.m.

Exhibition: May, 8 – June, 8 2008, Thu – Sun, 2 – 7 p.m., as well as May, 12 (Whit Monday)

Free entrance.

You can find the watchtower nearby the Puschkinallee in the park Schlesischer Busch. For further informations please contact Svenja Moor (0178-136 71 57, LUE@kunstfabrik.org).

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