

Exhibition December 1, 2023 – March 10, 2024

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Velázquez

Ulla von Brandenburg

One-Sequence Spaces



View of the exhibition *Ulla von Brandenburg. Le milieu est bleu* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2020. Photo: Aurélien Mole

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The work of Ulla von Brandenburg (b. 1974, Karlsruhe, Germany) is influenced by her early training as a stage designer and her passage through the world of the theatre. For this exhibition, the artist has created a series of textile installations which can be crossed in the manner of stage curtains through apertures that blur the limits between the inside and the outside. These textile geometric shapes are shown along with three films by the artist, broadening information, contributing nuances, and inciting the spectator to explore this new scenography of imbricated spaces and stories.

In this exhibition conceived specifically for the Palacio de Velázquez in Retiro Park, the artist encourages the public to become the protagonist of the theatrical scene. She cleverly transforms the notion of the formerly impenetrable fourth wall into an invitation to the viewer to resignify the work with their own experience, raising the possibility of an exchange of roles between spectator and actor. She thus establishes an itinerary with no specific direction, although one is suggested by a series of textile installations with geometric shapes that, much like stage curtains, can be traversed through openings, and that allow us, at the same time, to glimpse a spatial continuity in which the limits between the inside and the outside are blurred.

The simple geometric shapes that form the curtains refer us to the gestalt gestation that inspired the Bauhaus, a school that also underlies von Brandenburg's concept and artistic practice. The bright colors that

define each of the figures correspond to the psychological color theory of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), with which he argued for the emotional and phenomenological component of color. He thus refuted Newton, who understood colors as the mere results of physical laws. The artist filters Goethe's postulates through the German school of the interwar period, specifically referencing the first concepts of dance proposed by the Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), who advanced ideas for a ballet based on three geometric shapes: circle, square, and triangle. In this work, changes of color were to parallel shifts of mood, which led afterwards to the creation of the experimental *Das Triadische Ballett* (The Triadic Ballet), first performed in 1922.

The textile geometric shapes are displayed together with three films by the artist: *Maskiert und vor allem – verschwiegen* (Masked and Above All — Silent, 2022),



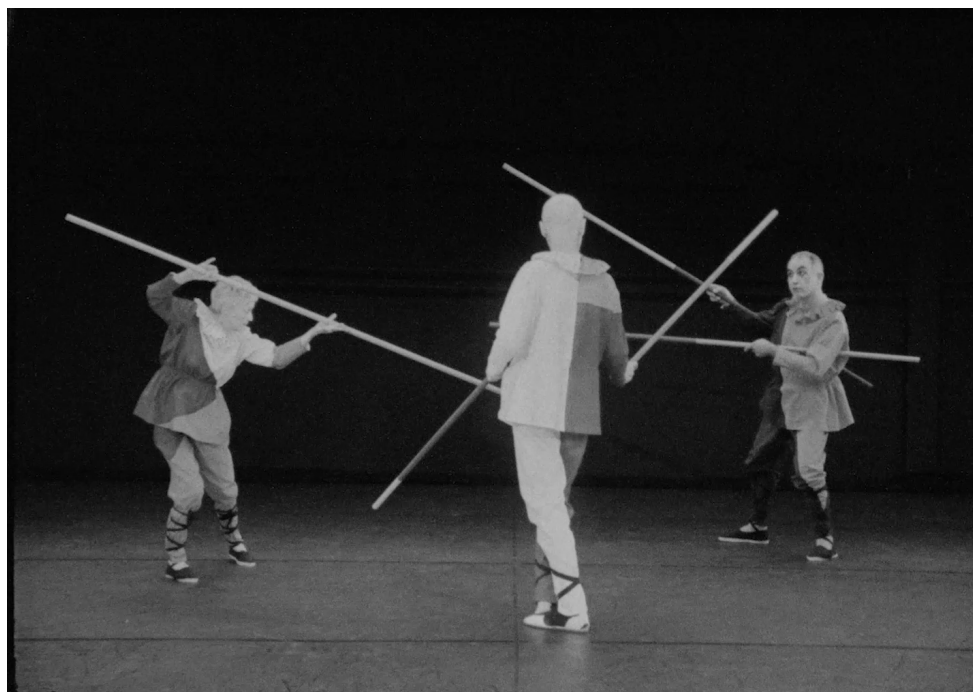
Shadowplay, 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Art: Concept (Paris); Meyer Riegger (Berlin/Karlsruhe); Pilar Corrias Gallery (London); Produzentengalerie Hamburg

Shadowplay (2012), and *The Objects* (2009). The filmic production that von Brandenburg has been working on continuously and intensely since 2002 is conceived in the form of installations that are resignified according to the different contexts in which they are shown, often acting as footnotes to the plastic art that accompanies them by expanding information or providing nuance.

Her films explore the language of theater, paying special attention to the performative and psychological components of the characters featured. Most of them are shot in 16mm, thus subordinating the duration of the content to the films' technical conditions. Moreover, the vast majority are filmed in a single sequence, with scarcely any editing. With these characteristics, the artist shows her interest in highlighting the human factor in relation to the behind-the-scenes and the imponderable. Moreover, the three films

shown in this exhibition are shot in black and white with the aim of distancing the spectator by complicating their location in time and space. Through this premeditated choice, they are set in contrast to the chromatic prominence of the geometric shapes.

In *Shadowplay*, one of her few films shot digitally, von Brandenburg has borrowed elements from the tradition of shadow theater in order to address cultural or social questions from different moments in history and explore how tales, rituals, and symbols constitute our societies over time. Through the play of shadows, a woman and two men dress and make themselves up with the aid of a limited but evocative set of props, and the male figures then fight a duel. While this is going on, the characters sing a piece of music composed in German by von Brandenburg in the form of a dialogue. In it, they lament their fate and bemoan the repetitive rituals and roles in which they are



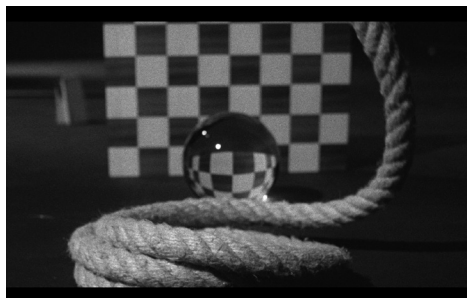
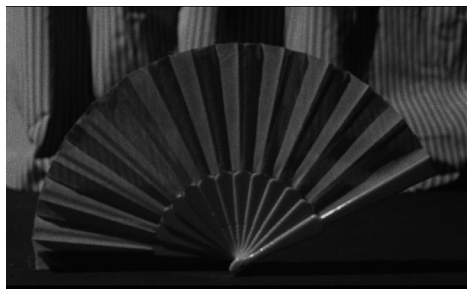
Maskiert und vor allem – verschwiegen (Masked and Above All—Silent, 2022). Courtesy of the artist and Art: Concept (Paris); Meyer Riegger (Berlin/Karlsruhe); Pilar Corrias Gallery (London); Produzentengalerie Hamburg

trapped, and it becomes clear as the scene evolves that theater and reality are confused. The shadow, a fundamental element of the piece, contributes another level of reading and significance in which, as occurs with the use of black and white, the spectator is submerged in a timeless dimension; at the same time it alludes directly to the allegory of Plato's cave, where the shadow symbolizes the sensory appearances of human life.

The Objects is a theater of objects presented in succession in a single sequence. It is a domestic choreography of things in which, while appealing to mystery and magic, the artist makes no attempt to conceal the trick behind their movement. The visibility of the strings in the scene reminds us of the

intricate relationship between illusion and reality. The inert objects that sometimes come to life also allude to the porosity between the living and the dead, another recurrent theme of her work. This perception is further reaffirmed by the rag doll in a corner of the installation.

Finally, in *Maskiert und vor allem – verschwiegen*, which reiterates the narrative intersection of reality and fiction, the scenography and montage of the filmic representation expand beyond the screen. The installation presented by von Brandenburg at the Palacio de Velázquez is complemented by various objects distributed around the space in an apparently random fashion: a large box, hoops, sticks, a rope, or a ball, all painted white. These are similar



The Objects, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Art: Concept (Paris); Meyer Riegger (Berlin/Karlsruhe); Pilar Corrias Gallery (London); Produzentengalerie Hamburg

objects with which the three characters in the film play and do acrobatics. The props appear to have escaped from the film, causing a confusion of spatiotemporal dimensions that is increased by the distancing produced through the absence of color. In their turn, the characters in the film will come to life on the opening day of the exhibition, performing with the objects and so making their games spill outside the projection.

With her different works, the artist offers us a complex narrative with many layers of reading for a spectator who is always situated at the center of the action. In an illusory and paradoxical game, von Brandenburg's continuous references to theatrical language become allusions to life itself, our existence in society, and the role we play in it.

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