

Peggy Buth

Patterned Bodies

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We pattern us: cloak our bodies with tissues, adorn them with ornaments and therewith ascribe to them cultural meaning; we are examined: our bodies unclothed, seized and judged according to certain norms – these two diametrical directions are inherent to “Patterned Bodies”. In Buth’s work “Finger it out” the patterned fabric is literally set in the background – as *backdrop* of a photographic scene – and the grid in form of an engraving on the glass plate steps to the foreground; the people portrayed have positioned themselves in-between, showing a gesture that ostensibly refuses the examining gaze. What can be seen is an allusion to a study by American scientists that was first published in 2000 and whose result is to prove that the proportions between index and ring finger are to give information about a person’s specific talents, sexual orientation or susceptibility to certain diseases. It is quite tempting to test this biomedical remake of physiognomics, a pseudo science that had emerged in the 18th century proclaiming that a person’s character can be derived from the physical features of the face, on oneself or friends – but watch out: already in the bourgeois saloons this has led sometimes to some disagreeable results.

The pattern that serves as blueprint for the video “you love me?” is the heterosexual matrix and the way it is articulated in gender roles, linguistic stereotypes and clichés that serve as basis for many film noir or nouvelle vague classics as well as more recent Hollywood blockbusters. From this range of films Peggy Buth has extracted dialogues, had them synchronized and interwoven with new, specially taken images or found footage to an entangled triangular relationship. But she has not only made a gender role ‘turn’; also the notorious topoi of a love romance – hotel rooms and bars, sun-sets, elevators, seashores and starlit skies – get out of line and are either a bit too prosaic or even slip into pure science fiction.

With the work “untitled (figure)” und “déformation professionnelle” Buth continues the work body of the carpet and tar pieces. The reference to patterns is here more abstract, though. With the countersinking of the carpet she recurs to the form of a grid but breaks it and has it simultaneously ‘frayed out’. The ‘patterns’ here result from destroying the surface; in the case of the tar piece, however, the surface is generated but by overlapping layers. The ruler-like etchings through the uneven tar and shellac surfaces seem like the parceling of an unsafe territory, a parceling that appears in its fragility to question itself at the same time.

April 2008, Susanne Holschbach