

## **A post-surrealistic photographic performance about loneliness**

**Corinna Streitz – “Gespinnste“ / English title: “Gossamer” (2011)**

**Portfolio review in Bratislava (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2011)**

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This is the last reflection on the Portfolio Review in Bratislava of November 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, with a short supplement on the year 2010 which altered Polish history in such a tragic way. For Polish photography, the conclusion is not an optimistic one. Firstly, young Polish photographers do not appear in presentations such as the current Portfolio Review in Bratislava. I do not know why, since that is a chance to exhibit or to achieve financial success in Europe, e.g. in Vienna or Berlin. Secondly, comparing young or even middle-aged artists from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Russia, Austria, France and other countries to those from Poland, I dare say that the comparison is very unfavourable for Poland. For some years now I have lived with the conviction that the number of Polish schools for photography and the number of professors, contests, and festivals will lead to a state where photographers and especially female ones will hold a strong position in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nothing like that has happened, however (apart from a few exceptions in recent years), and it will not happen soon.

But let us return to the reality of the end of 2011, with its warm, blurry, but gloomy days, which are themselves reminiscent of the climate of Corinna Streitz' (born 1970) photography. In the 2011 series *Gespinnste (Gossamer)*, she successfully continues the programme of surrealistic photography, elaborating on its romantic-symbolism. The series includes about 30 black-and-white analogue photographs. Obviously, Corinna is not a surrealist, as the era of surrealist revolution took place a long time ago in the twenties and thirties, but her programme and its meaning are mainly informed by André Breton. In 2011, the German artist returns to the same problems which bothered the environment of the Parisian surrealists. With that she reminds us of Breton's *Nadja*, the roman-à-clef (key novel) of the founder of this movement, which treats human solitude in life as well as in dream and which will end in a nightmare.

In the work of Corinna Streitz, the boundaries between reality and over-reality are blurred again, a precise blurring like in the best films by Luis Buñuel.



(There is one question to ask – who is the person we see in the picture above? We do not know the answer because in each picture, we seem to spy on a different person. Once it is a girl, the next time a mature woman, and sometimes even a man. The concept of sex is blurred, a conscious transgression).



I really like the series *Gespinnste*. It is also available in a printed edition which can be seen on the artist's website (<http://corinnastreitz.net>). It is worth looking at and please, do not do it in a hurry. That is why this year, during the Portfolio Review, it was exactly that work I voted for, although Corinna did not reach any of the first ten positions. I like the atypical and dynamic arrangement of her work, which is rarely used in such a disharmonic manner with the intention to emphasize the idea further.

In Poland, similar concepts of arrangement are used e.g. by Magda Hueckel, as well as by the undersigned on the Biennale of Photography in Poznan in 2009.

For four years now Corinna regularly takes part in workshops and seminars at the *Neue Schule für Fotografie, Berlin*. She has been a student of the well-known photographer and tutor Wolfgang Zurborn who staged an exhibition in the gallery FF in Lodz. In 2011, Corinna also took classes with Eva Bertram. It is possible to think of an analogy: the “scintillating” and colourful clipping of the world as Zurborn shows it and the feminine introspective of a child’s world shown by Bertram being on one side of the mirror; on the other side, its reflection in the form of the always very personal and secretive photographs of Corinna Streit. But now is not the time and place to analyse that.



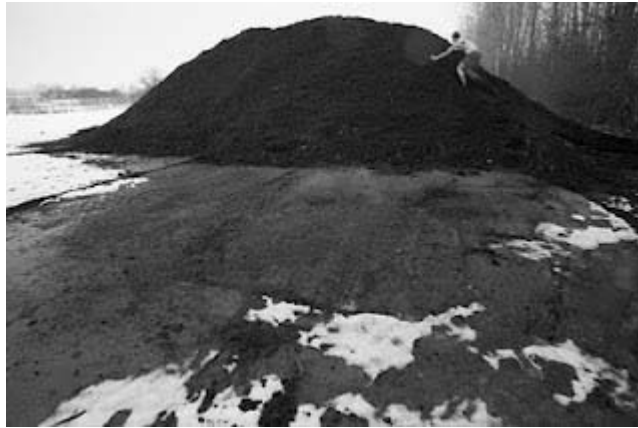
(The photograph which is taken in the middle of a forest, reminds me of one of the works of Hans Bellmer. Although Corinna is familiar with his work, the titular 'puppet' is missing in this picture -unless the artist herself plays one in a narcissistic way.

Such an interpretation does not convince me. I rather notice an overcoming of personal fears and a manifestation of them at the same time. Furthermore, there is a surrealistic masking of one's identity through defragmentation.)



The series in question confronts us with a genre that was quite popular in the 80ies and 90ies, the photo-performance, which nowadays is rarely seen. It continues the traditions of German expressionism as well as surrealism. Some works resemble the accomplishments of Diane Ducruet, for example, the self-portrait among the poppy-heads. Others draw on Francis Bacon's tradition of painting, and do so successfully.

This year in Bratislava, during the *Month of Photography*, we were able to take a look at a very good exhibition in a "climate" near to Corinna's work. The exhibition had a surrealist-expressionist style, but was related to a statement carried out by drawings. Those in turn were referring to and entering in a dialogue with Corinna's own photography. This exhibition by Birgit Jürgenssen (1949-2003) was in the spirit of the Viennese *fin de siècle*. However, one significant difference should be noted: Corinna Streitz' work is not feminist, unlike Jürgenssen's work. It does not protest against nor fight for anything.



(Please notice the archetypal image in the picture above. It refers to the never-ending mental struggle which is also known from the recollections of Werner Herzog and the works of many other artists; an observation I mentioned to the author in Bratislava).

There is one more aspect I have to emphasise. The artist is in perfect command of each photograph, creating its visualisation and a convincing mood. She does the same whether the image contains a gloomy landscape, a luxurious interior or an architectural detail. It is rare for an artist to have that much talent to compose each photograph in a way that it is filled with his or her own introspectiveness.



(To me, the work above seems to be the one which is the nearest to the gloomy and anti-humanistic climate of Bacon's outstanding work. It is also the nearest to classic surrealism which could depict figures half human, half animal, arising from human unconsciousness, like Max Ernst did.)



(Please also notice the unusual character of this photograph. The inert body floating on the water (a sign of death?) has a symbol on it, a snake. What does the symbol refer to? Death, evil, misery or maybe all of them?)



The final work depicts the metaphor of life's transitivity, reminding us of nature's unity: people-plants-insects. There also is an emphasis on the perishability and instability of the medium of 'photography', shown by the folded – or maybe intentionally damaged – bottom of the photograph. I do not take into account the cover with the delirious reflection of the once again masked, narcissistic body. Interestingly enough, it is decorated with suffering, namely with an image of Saint Sebastian. So is the photography, according to my analysis, a late-modernist emblem, since it is surrealist in the origin of eternal life in the postmodern world? The new iconography needs new symbols of life and death. The requirement for their creation is loneliness and alienation in the unreal world.