

Performances in Sophiensaele

Eva Meyer-Keller takes cherries and apples to task.

By Doris Meierhenrich Source: <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/29592666> ©2018

The performance could actually begin right here: Eva Meyer-Keller's studio is a bright whitewashed ground floor room in a rear building in Pankow with an oil stove on one wall, crowded shelves and a corner kitchen on another and two solitary ropes hanging on a third.

Those who know the 45 year old's work will immediately wince at the ropes. Torture methods will flit through the imagination, even when the ropes are quickly revealed to be yoga equipment. The images are already there however, and the eerily beautiful studio's circle of influence seems to spread out indefinitely.

Torture workshop and kitchen laboratory

And so we already find ourselves in the middle of that whirring, highly charged, black humoured but always tangible game that Eva Meyer-Keller has been playing for a good twenty years, between simple things and the irrational rings of meaning around them. She binds spaces with strings and makes objects into characters. Her favourite objects are apples and cherries, everything in which symbolism and utility merge.

And as she works, her stage turns itself into a socio-microscopic kitchen laboratory. Even as a dance student in Amsterdam in the mid-90s, this passionate photographer and draftswoman from a small town in southern Germany was already making hybrid performances whose first prerequisite was knowing no border between the visual and performing arts.

Cherries under the iron

Her breakthrough came in 2002 when, in a 40 minute performance, she stoically martyred a line of around 40 cherries according to a strict plan, each with its own special utensil. And what does 'martyred' mean? Actually, she does nothing more than celebrate a sort of alphabet of childlike domestic fruit dissection: one cherry studded with pins, one lying beneath a slowly heating iron, another one sealed into a tee infuser and hung from a door frame.

Nothing spectacular, actually, but everyone recognises a terrible torture regime in these small actions. What is it all about, between the cherry table getting redder and redder, the imagination of the observer, between the reality and its supposed representation in theatre, the current political situation, history?

The audience gets it

“Death is Certain” has become Meyer-Keller’s central performance and one she continues to present all over the world. She’s just arrived back from the Fajr Festival in Tehran. She is still struck with the size of the festival and the openness of the people there. The censors were interested in her cherries of course (in Tehran they were strawberries), but somehow they couldn’t fault the ‘domestic aesthetic’, as Meyer-Keller calls her physical / metaphysical displacement technique. The distance between the iron and what the police actually use was apparently great enough, however, she clearly felt the serious attention of the implicated audience.

What is reality? On its own it is flat, says Eva Meyer-Keller in her Pankow studio. On the studio floor, a different kind of empty food boxes describe a meaningfully perfect circle. She is trying out the last changes to her latest performance “Some Significance” which starts this Thursday at the Sophiensaele. Reality is constructed behind what is visible, she says. This airy mixture of science and poetry is what confronts our firm assumptions on the premiere. Our reality is not in fact based on anything ‘real’, she laughs.

Children build catastrophes

What is an atom? Who has ever seen one? Yet we all know that famous cherry model of core with an electron skin. Even this image is a total fiction as Meyer-Keller experiments and cooks mischievously with this real / unreal knowledge of the world and incompatible ingredients.

In 2011, she did actually cook up catastrophes with real chefs and four years before that, children were the cooks: “Cooking Catastrophes” and “Building Catastrophes” they were called. Both times cameras mediated shifts of meaning, hinting at how deliberately manipulative we are when we exaggerate or minimise catastrophes.