

WHEN THE MESSAGE HIDES BEHIND A FLOWER (by Severine Cattin)

In her solo exhibition at the Gallery Une in Auvernier, the artist Verena Vanoli presents a psychedelic vision made out of rubber on the subject of flowers. It is an art of ambiguity in which one picture hides another one.

One can hardly imagine daily life without flowers who make it beautiful. Accessible and of unique beauty, flowers always were part of the favorite motifs of artists. But what happens, when this motif - one also could call too cute - clashes with the radicalism of contemporary photography?

The artist Verena Vanoli proposes a hallucinating vision at the gallery Une in Auvernier. Succeeding traditional still lifes in which flowers are understood as a symbol for the fleeting nature of beauty, a new conception of flowers is affirmed here: they become an ideal surface of projection allowing the artist to create and express double perceptions.

For many years already, Verena Vanoli uses the inner tubes of bicycles wheels in her art and they became her favorite work material. While reusing them in her work she gives these formerly useless tubes of black rubber a second life. Out of her imagination arise monumental flowers, surrounded by black rubber tubes, like chained up or captivated by them, but she also creates chairs and other objects of daily life. But on the occasion of her first solo exhibition at the Galerie Une, the artist chose to present her most recent photographs. Verena Vanoli contradicts the classic codes of perception and brings out by subtle means the complexity of the medium itself, by leaving the usual ground of photography. Subject of her photographs is the act of seeing, the way of perceiving. The artist uses the full esthetic power of the photographic image to evoke the spectator's curiosity and to captivate him, before she leads him, step by step, to the construction site of the image. This way, the spectator starts to perceive all of a sudden the luminous images, laying on top of these floral visions: he starts to see still lifes made of rubber tubes or religious processions in Mexico. In the work 'Ciudad de Mexico' for instance, the heart of a splendid white flower reveals transparently and hallucination-like the image of a bird's-eye view of Mexico City.

During her stay in Mexico, the artist accumulated a repertory of images and uses them to make montages, either by juxtaposing or superposing them. While doing so, she creates double perceptions, which generate a variety of spiritual sensations. Her brightly colored flowers sometimes become mystical, when they reveal photographs of silent religious processions, and sometimes they are dreamlike, when they unveil icy landscapes covered with snow and snow crystals.

As much as they are structuring the space, Verena Vanoli's meditative photographs remind of the effects of psychedelic lightshows from the late 1960s. Since their comeback through Andy Warhol, flowers as a popular motif didn't disappear anymore from artist's studios. And some of the greatest artists even cultivated this motif to the point of obsession.

And as one can see here, flowers also have subtly and unconventionally conquered the space of the gallery Une.

Cattin, Séverine, L'image se dissimule derrière la fleur, in: L'Express, Neuchâtel, 16.10.10, S.13, ill.