

Sensory Spaces is a series of solo shows in the Willem van der Vorm Gallery, the free exhibition space in the museum's entrance area. For each edition, a different artist is invited to make use of the gallery's architectural qualities in a novel way.

## **Sensory Spaces 2 – Sabine Hornig**

Sabine Hornig (Germany 1964) is known for making photographs, sculptures and installations that distort or intensify our experience of space and time. At first glance, her work can appear deceptively simple, but with a longer look, it becomes evident that it is testing the viewer's perception. This gallery-sized installation, specially produced for Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, is no exception. The work consists of an open wooden structure with transparent printed fabric stretched over it on the inside. Handmade architectural elements, including a window sill, table platform and a swinging wall, have been placed on either side of the construction. Visitors can walk around the structure or enter it through an opening. Inside, they see that the space is not closed but transparent. The printed fabric is so sheer that the existing gallery space appears to have been overlaid with a fictive second space. This second space seems to stand at the crossroads between reality and fiction.

This effect is heightened by the images depicted on the fabric: photographs of street scenes and display windows of vacant shops taken by Hornig in her hometown Berlin and in other cities. They have been shot from the street, so that the view of each empty interior mingles with the reflection in the glass. Some photographs are the same size as elements of the wooden construction, turning them into window frames. The transparent fabric causes the architectural elements and the space on the other side of the window to resemble reflections. The result is a complex image composed of different locations and temporal layers. In this singular setting, one simultaneously perceives front, back, present and past.

Hornig has closed off the ends of the Willem van der Vorm Gallery with two walls that mesh with the museum's existing architecture. This subtle intervention not only alters the space but also determines the contours of the work. With this delineation, the space surrounding the construction becomes part of the installation. Because visitors find themselves inside the installation as soon as they enter the gallery, they are part of it.

Though Hornig has used transparent materials before, working with sheer fabric is relatively new for her. She incorporated it for the first time last winter in several sculptures exhibited at the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York. The show was entitled *Transparent Things*, after the book by the Russian author Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977). In Nabokov's novel from 1972, the main character travels to a city in Switzerland four times during his life. Various events take place on these trips through which the book investigates the concept of time and its relation to memory. The reference to Nabokov points up another important aspect of Hornig's work: many of her sculptures and installations appeal to the viewer's memory. A good example is *'Twins'* (1996-2005), which consists of two nearly identical rooms that are directly adjacent to each other and have their own separate entrances. The rooms are divided by a wall featuring a large window, through which the other, inaccessible side of the room can be seen. Each window contains an image printed on transparent photographic film material,

fixed between two glass plates. The photographs show an empty shop interior, viewed from the street and mingling with the reflection in the display window. Each photograph is taken from a different angle, creating a subtle shift in the image. Visitors to the exhibition are taken to view the installation twice. The second time, they may believe they are on the other side of the same room, but in fact they are on the other side of the wall in the adjacent gallery. Only those who remember the previous photograph realise they are in another part of the installation.

With works like 'Twins' and the installation for Sensory Spaces, Hornig makes the viewer think in an almost philosophical way about the experience of space and the passage of time. Her complex, hallucinatory installations string together different moments, locations and perspectives. Though Hornig's work can regularly be seen in international solo and group exhibitions, this is the first time it has been shown in the Netherlands. In addition, this is the first installation she has created that consists largely of wall scale photographs printed on transparent fabric. These are good reasons to pose a few questions to the artist.

**Email conversation between Sabine Hornig and Saskia van Kampen-Prein, curator Modern and Contemporary Art at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and compiler of the exhibition**

**SvKP** First of all, can you tell us something about your artistic background? Have space, time and memory always played a role in your work?

**SH** My work often departs from architectural elements in a given space. I'm interested in how our perception of interiors is influenced by our temporal-spatial cognition and the memories of specific places. In an urban context I explore the way spaces formed by diverse perspectives (e.g.: political) or historical periods intersect and overlap. In the 1990's, I began making works of connected window and door frames. I used white walls to "de-install" the space into an imagination of it, a passageway with views. Profane objects and systems are converted and *inverted*: becoming uncanny.

**SvKP** Printed photographs make up an important part of your installation for Sensory Spaces. How did you go about selecting the images, and what has determined the order they appear in?

**SH** Normally I start with a spatial situation, for which I am seeking an image, or from an image, which I incorporate into a room or a specific form. For the installation 'Double Transparency' I transformed the walls of the museum, on which art is normally displayed, into membrane-like vehicles of information: a freely traversable and transparent construction site. I chose an assortment of images from my archives, many of them referential or inspirational source material for other works, shown here side by side with finished compositions. I then allow these enlargements and reductions to alternate haphazardly. Today, the theme of transparency is often discussed as if it were physical space. With the influx of information overload, the old predominant hierarchies in the selection of images are subverted. The ensuing

struggle for spatial orientation is echoed here in the changing perspectives of the images.

**SvKP** This is your first installation to consist largely of printed transparent fabric. Around it, you've placed separate architectural elements. Can you say something more about the characteristics and significance of these two components in relation to your other work?

**SH** The fabric prints are delicate, like fleeting reflections on glass. But there is no glass here and these are printed reflections. The sheer cloth has a tenuous, transient substantiality, the photographic layers literally interweave. The plastered architectural elements, like dysfunctional furniture, provide a blunt contrast and heavy counterweight. Also, ironically, the solid fragments penetrate the walls, mirrored on the other side. Rough stucco textures confuse and imply exterior facades, or maybe interior walls? The rooms seem to be turned inside-out. The focus here is on materiality versus immateriality, the open and expansive versus blunt obstruction. I also allude to the scattered debris of modernism in architecture, as in pre-fabs. Such postmodern structures remind us of specific places, in spite of their anonymity and similarity to each other.

**SvKP** What is the installation's relationship to the museum's collection and this specific location in the entrance area of the museum building?

**SH** For one thing, I chose images of still lifes, cityscapes and interior views that transport these themes to contemporary settings. These overlap and double play in passage through the exhibition, just as the paintings in the collection often contain pictures within the picture that open to worlds beyond the frame. Also, there is an almost materialistic insistence on the immediate reality of the subject matter in the works of the Dutch Masters. Unlike their contemporaries from Germany and France, the emphasis is on representation of domestic and everyday things and occurrences. Even the beautiful interiors are documents of daily life, as opposed to transcendental idealizations or historical accounts, showing a keen eye for the worldly, the universal, and the commonplace. Likewise, in *Double Transparency*, the momentary, unnoticed or the overlooked are enlarged, and beauty and decay are equally lit. As my work is preoccupied with facades and entryways, the lobby of the museum was clearly the perfect location for it.

### **Illustrations**

1. One or more photographs of the model (MBVB installation)
2. Overview photograph of 'Transparent Things' solo exhibition (2013)
3. Photograph of 'Twins' installation / floor plan (preferred) of 'Twins' installation