

On the exhibition

Chris Kraus, Plastic is Leather, Fuck You: Film and Video 1983-1993

May 9 - June 14, 2008

Chris Kraus's trilogy of novels *I Love Dick*, *Aliens & Anorexia* and *Torpor* (1997-2007) stand as perhaps the most complete realizations of the contemporary avant-garde novel. What readers of the books know is that the novels came directly out of Kraus's early work as an experimental film maker on the Lower East Side in the 1980s. This exhibition puts these strange and seminal documents on view in Europe for the first time in twelve years.

In her artistic praxis, C. Kraus moves easily between art and science, fiction and art criticism, autobiography and novels. Focusing on themes which she pursues through various genres, her work is a critical examination of art, literature and theoretical discourse. Consequently, her works evade customary designation. *In Order To Pass* (1982) is an 'essayist' film, using text as visual material; *I Love Dick* (1997), combines polemical autobiography and narrative within the shell of the classical epistolary novel form. The content of her transdisciplinary praxis is accordingly broad in reach, yet individual artists and theorists repeatedly recur in her oeuvre, as do topics including the contemporary US art scene, gender roles in art and the academic world, sex, etc. As leitmotifs, these people and discernibly link the different parts of her oeuvre to form a coherent whole.

In her novel *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000) she describes the failed attempt to find a distributor at the Berlin International Film Festival for her movie *Gravity and Grace* (1996), characterizing the experience with typical self-humor: "Since 1982 I'd been a filmmaker, producing dense and difficult, unlikeable experimental movies, exhibiting them in clubs and venues where projectors broke and people talked and heckled." Dovetailing accounts of the film with the rest of the book is characteristic of Kraus' approach: her own experiences become objects of her artistic work, without ever being fully rendered as fiction.

In this way, a network of references arises that continue to drift through each new work. In *Aliens*, Kraus describes making her film *Gravity & Grace* and recounts its story. These passages are elegantly and associatively interwoven with other topics, most notably the biography of philosopher Simone Weil, from whom the film's title was borrowed. C. Kraus developed this technique of combining disparate elements in her early films by alluding to, quoting from or embodying the works of other authors (*Foolproof Illusion*, 1987; *The Golden Bowl or Repression*, 1984/88).

The first showing of Chris Kraus' films at Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender offers viewers the opportunity to explore the various sub-divisions and cross-linkages within her oeuvre. In this way, visitors will be able to see how her films and books comment on one another, something entailing a reflection on the relationship of film and text that is also part of a critical inquiry into the canonized forms of narrative. Thus her autobiographical epistolary novel *I love Dick* (1997) highlights narrative as a concrete act that occurs by writing to an addressee. A comparable experimental reflection on different forms of representation was already innate in her film *In Order to Pass* (1982), where she took an "essay", which among other things addresses the theme of memory, as the starting point for a filmic discussion on narrative.

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