

Collect, Classify and Open Doors

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A moiré effect shimmers on the metal door of the elevator we are enclosed in. Suddenly the elevator door opens and a fitness room appears before our eyes. Neon lighting is fixed to the ceiling. Along the walls to the left and right a row of exercise treadmills on which people in shorts hop. From the machines a mechanical, rhythmic sound arises and merges with the dreary background music of the hit parade. The elevator door closes again and the ride continues.

In the art discourse of the mid-1990s, the theme of the archive and of archiving could hardly be avoided. Exhibitions and publications took up the subject and attempted to analyze the role of collecting, sorting, documenting, conserving and publishing material in an art context. But not only did ‘the archive’ become a central concept in art theory, one could almost say archiving itself became an autonomous and frequently deployed art genre, which was accepted by artists as a usable and useful form, but also as a working tool. One decade later and all this was pushed to the sidelines, perhaps because archiving and the use of archived material had become a routine task. The global dispersion of digital tools has enormously simplified reproduction and conservation. In its wake the theme of archiving has also – unjustifiably – lost in significance.

The door opens again. This time something appears that could be the back room of a hunting shop. In a Formica-white, half-empty rack, firearms are stacked. The stuffed head of a stag hangs on the wall and under it two monitors transmit pictures from CCTV cameras. The door closes. The journey continues.

Sonja Feldmeier devotes a large degree of her art praxis to the principle of archiving. Several of her works are ingenious classification systems of precise and meticulously compiled picture material. They are however not simply set up for objective observation but are embedded in a fictional, often installative context. They are thus turned into modular elements for the development of a more complex narration with spatial qualities. For example, video films of interiors from American big cities are mounted together as the floors of an absurd, tower-of-Babel skyscraper colossus (‘Neverending’, 2004). The camouflage patterns of military uniforms are made into clay models of

fictive landscapes, and in a further process the patterns reappear as two-dimensional map paintings. Via such transferences, Feldmeier opens up a new dimension in the idea of political geography ('Meter hinter dem Meeresspiegel'/meters behind sea level, 2006).

On a stage made of artificial rock, a white concert piano waits for its pianist, while guests continue to eat at their tables. Doors close again. And open again. The sky between the houses is much too blue to be genuine and unmask the historicist house facades as a film set. Or perhaps it's an amusement park? Doors close. This time we descend; the door opens again: a room lined in marble is full of security personnel who obviously have nothing to do.

Three years long and in many countries, Sonja Feldmeier has filmed people dressed in military garb. She calls her procedure a "recruiting act", making the people into members of her personal army. Following the montage, they become protagonists in a video work where this 'Personal Army' (2007) marches chaotically through unfamiliar cities. In these scenarios, the figure of a dwarf intervenes, who metamorphoses into a giant over the course of time. He moves among the crowd and tries to create order – a thankless and almost hopeless task.

The journey is endlessly long. Other floors in the building contain larmoyant play areas, ghostly museums, airplane cabins, disorderly bedrooms, stores overflowing with goods, workshops and broom cupboards. Disoriented and fascinated, we let ourselves be transported in the elevator and borne away to complex worlds. The door opens and closes again.