SHE IS THE OTHER GAZE

A FILM BY CHRISTIANA PERSCHON

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SYNOPSIS

She is the other gaze

„The machismo here was vehement.“ Any of the artists could have made this statement: Renate Bertlmann, Linda Christianell, Lore Heuermann, Karin Mack, or Margot Pilz. What unites the women, who were all part of the Viennese art scene in the 1970s, is the memory of an era of humiliating paternalism. In She ist the other gaze, filmmaker Christiana Perschon lets these women, born between 1936 and 1943, tell their stories of male ignorance and the invisibility associated with that, of denial of their creativity, of a situation in which their only possibility to learn was from men. When the artists talk about sexual assault, about helplessness in the face of patriarchal structures in society and the family, about being defined by their role as mothers, and a lack of autonomy, the old rage still flashes through at times.

Nonetheless, what defines the documentary is its protagonists’ passion and positivity. Their resistance ultimately found a prolific echo in the Austrian women’s movement — in initiatives such as the Aktion unabhängiger Frauen (AUF) and the feminist artists’ network Intakt. Encouraged by the Frankfurter Schule slogan „the private is the political,” and reinforced by a collective of likeminded women, these forerunners found the courage to transform what was pressing on their minds into artistic works. Perschon provides this act of self-empowerment a creative form in She ist the other gaze: the white primed canvases by the artist Iris Dostal serve as a symbolic platform in the film, as a stage for narration and work. A respectful free space emerges in which the artists are invited to collaborate with the director in presenting and staging their works. (Anne Katrin Feßler for sixpackfilm)
Every encounter with an image, every interaction searches for its own form. She is the other gaze is a documentary film and a collaboration with female visual artists of an older generation who have been part of the Viennese art scene since the 1970s and engaged in the women’s movement. I invited Renate Bertlmann, Linda Christianell, Lore Heuermann, Karin Mack and Margot Pilz into my studio to talk about their self-determination and their resistance to a patriarchal society and to share artistic practices.

Exchange has been and still is a feminist strategy. Talking about art practice as well as personal memories and to feel the energy of their resistance was one of my main interests in approaching my protagonists. In a series of interviews they share thoughts about the postwar era, the female role as wife, housewife and mother, studying without role models, self-liberation, career and political conditions. Time is inscribed in their speech, bodies and art practice. I chose those artists because their work caught my attention and touched me whether for aesthetic reasons or contentwise dealing with freeing oneself from fixed notions of reality and the dominated male gaze and art market. In their role as feminist pioneers they are a great influence on the contemporary art scene and the self-understanding of younger artists like myself today.

She is the other gaze starts with the idea of creating a moment, where observing, experience and imagination impact an image carrier: be it a primed canvas or the light sensitive emulsion of analogue film. With a 16mm Bolex camera I filmed Iris Dostal, a younger artist (like myself) priming canvases. This repetitive process serves as a symbolic stage for narration and work for the protagonists. I tried to make tangible what happens between artist and image carrier. The following encounters with five artists of an older generation create a constellation-based space focusing on their earlier works. I use daylight, motion and sound to re-stage, re-animate or re-enact a photo serie, a performance, an installation and objets trouvés, playing with the transformative power of art objects through filmic language. I look at those art works as documents of a certain zeitgeist. I was interested in their after life, which stretches the idea of translation and appropriation, inviting me to transform the past into the present.
I asked myself how do I perceive an art work outside the white cube? What does daylight and movement do to art objects which are usually locked up in museum depots waiting to be exhibited? How are the art objects transformed by moving images using my camera lens and montage tools?

She is the other gaze is entirely shot in one location, my studio. The invitation to my studio reverses somehow the topos of the artist talk as we know it: usually taking place in the artist’s studio, using talking heads and over the shoulder shots to get a glimpse of what a creative process might look like. I try to avoid this kind of artist portray. Instead I prefer a collaborative approach: It is not me filming the artist in their studio, but inviting them into my space, out of their comfort zone, to create something new through my camera lens - an apparatus placed in between. I’m reframing and transferring their earlier works into the medium of film by setting their art in motion. My camera work is based on empathy, relying on gestures and the other /returning gaze. I think empathy is a political tool in this process avoiding a single point of view. Interaction defines my imagery while my camera acts as the receiver of the gaze, mutual seeing and being seen. This kind of collaboration depends on trust in the imaginary and resonance, on what is about to evolve out of dialogue and appropriating art.
**WORLD PREMIERE VIENNALE ’18**

Christiana Perschon’s documentary *She is the other gaze* presents a series of interviews with five female visual artists: Renate Bertlmann, Linda Christanell, Lore Heuermann, Karin Mack, Margot Pilz. Most of these artists started their careers in the 1970s, in Vienna, and the film explores the relation between their practice and feminism. As we see them working, performing in front of the camera or commenting on some of their pieces, they recall the difficulties, constraints and resistances encountered at the beginning of their paths. *She is the other gaze* has a unified tone (minimalist, drenched in white, without music), while building each segment as a particular collaboration between the artist and the filmmaker, in an intergenerational dialogue whose traces are visible on screen. Equally, each one of the artists featured has a unique approach, a specific artistic vision, but their trajectories have all been informed, in one way or another, by women’s issues: the fight against patriarchal structures, the lack of visibility, an intimate relation to the objects of everyday domesticity, the difficulties in negotiating family life and artistic ambitions. (Cristina Álvarez López, Viennale ’18)

**DIAGONALE ’19 NATIONAL COMPETITION**

In their works, the feminist artists Renate Bertlmann, Karin Mack, Linda Christanell, Margot Pilz, and Lore Heuermann opposed the male power structures of the 1970s. Christiana Perschon’s camera, as an apparatus placed in between, consistently fathoms new forms for transferring the earlier works into the medium of film, and setting them in motion. With *Sie ist der andere Blick*, the filmmaker gives rise to a constellation-based space for thought on artistic strategies of appropriation. (Jana Koch, Diagonale ’19)

**AWARD FOR BEST CAMERA DOCUMENTARY FILM DIAGONALE’19**

„Christiana Perschon nähert sich den Künstlerinnen und deren Werken mit bis ins letzte Detail durchkomponierten Bildern. Mit ihrer Kamera lenkt sie unseren Blick auf die Essenz der Werke und macht diese erlebbar. Ihr gelingt es, sehr unterschiedliche künstlerische Ausdrucksweisen in einem eigenen künstlerischen Ausdruck zu vereinen und schafft dadurch ein Kunstwerk mit großer Strahlkraft.“ (Jury: Philipp Jedicke, Jurij Meden, Seraina Rohrer)
More Tea for You?

In their precise and startlingly still relevant 1978 “Femifest,” the female artist group IntAkt states: “We aim to challenge the current and ongoing process of profitability established by the patriarchal system by contributing to ways that enable people to live a dignified life.” One of the protagonists of She Is the Other Gaze, Karin Mack, quotes from this midway through the film while Christiana Perschon switches from the image of a photographic self-portrait of the artist looking at the viewer through opera glasses to her shadow on a white wall and then to a blurry blue-green image. The background slowly comes into focus: a brick wall and green trees framed by a slightly still blurry window – from the intimacy of the workspace out to the world...

Opacity, soft focus, emptiness: Perschon’s portrait of a generation of female artists in their 80s deals with much more than getting close to them and how they lived their lives, it is, namely, about the question of representation. After all, what is this “other gaze” – and Perschon backs away from the “female gaze” – that is not masculine or hetero-normative? And what might “another” kind of filmmaking look like, filming and representing against performance conventions and filmic codes?

In reference and opposition to Laura Mulvey, the theoretician who defined the “male gaze” in the 1970s, American filmmaker Jill Soloway describes the “female gaze” as including a “way of feeling seeing.” Perschon pursues this notion on several levels: through her close collaboration with the artists; through the composition of her images, switching between color and black and white as well as precisely framed analog and digital cameras; and through her use of sound as well. She Is the Other Gaze begins with noises: the shutter, whir, and threading of a Bolex camera, a paint-brush that brushes against a canvas. The sound is there before the first image “resolves” out of a blurry gray-whiteness and a voice begins to narrate. At first, the five protagonists are only present as voices, while we see a woman priming white canvases. In introducing the artists without helping to identify them, Perschon is looking for other ways to recount biography in place of the convention of singularity-based artist lives.

Therefore while Lore Heuermann, Karin Mack, Renate Bertlmann, Margot Pilz, and Linda Christianell chronicle discrimination, self-discovery, and self-empowerment, the painter Iris Dostal, representing a younger generation – Perschon’s own – paints surfaces with unbelievable vehemence, regularity, and calm. She serves as a link, preparing surfaces to project the following stories onto. These must nevertheless first be painted over and “emptied” to be able to be described again. The effacement that is also present in this and often the forgetting of what has come before as well seem characteristic of feminism, and efforts to reconstruct the “historical meaning of women” (Femifest) in the next generation, to connect to the “mothers of invention.” This unusual “forgetting” of feminist achievements could be explained as feminism’s resistance to its own institutionalization. But perhaps the “other” images, sounds, and speech through and with which it can also be told must be found first? Perschon is looking for these insofar as she does not renounce her own handwriting in her collaborations, bringing herself into the image and, above all, providing “her” place, her first studio in Vienna’s WUK cultural center, for the encounters with the women. They are as varied as the artworks themselves: playful, tender, and adoring, as well as quite distanced.

“You only see what you know,” says Lore Heuermann, which Perschon rephrases as a question: “How do I see more than I know?” She answers with an affective way of looking, with an empathetic gaze that is aware of her presence and the camera. This affection is always on thematic and verbal levels: the materials are haptic and audio-visually tangible. The wind brushes against Renate Bertlmann’s latex works on a clothesline and makes them flutter. Linda Christianell’s hands play with objects and shape them into statements. Lore Heuermann’s exclamations and invocations at the end that our task is not to subordinate ourselves is in turn moving. During the film, the director is often offered tea; a gesture, a “touch,” in which the radical “other” finally makes an invitation to a mutual conversation and collaboration that can then be expressed in the in between and through difference.

If feminist work means working collectively or collaboratively, breaking apart the totality of a story or “master narrative,” using fragments and soft focus as narrative strengths, and not seeking resolution, searching for another kind of biographical storytelling than the artist vita, then Christiana Perschon’s film is deeply and radically feminist.

Claudia Slanar, Blickle Kino Belvedere 21

Sie ist der andere Blick ist bei aller Würdigung subjektiver Erfahrungen und künstlerischer Handschriften vor allem auch eine kollektive Erzählung. Vom traditionellen Künstler*innenporträt, von seinem staatstragenden Historisierungspathos und der Fixierung auf Individualismus und Ikonizität könnte Perschon also kaum weiter entfernt sein (...)

Mit jeder Künstlerin nimmt der Film eine andere Form an, wobei die Verbindungen auch hier offen und „solidarisch“ bleiben – weder Perschon, noch den beteiligten Künstlerinnen geht es um die Konsolidierung der eigenen Signatur. Sie ist der andere Blick ist auch in diesem Sinn ein Modell für ein „alternatives“ Porträt: Der Platz im Atelier wird wie ein Staffelstab weitergegeben. Esther Buss, TEXTE ZUR KUNST
„Kunst der Vermittlung: Damit ist bereits eine der großen Qualitäten von Sie ist der andere Blick benannt: Als Porträtfilm begnügt er sich nicht damit, seine Protagonistinnen in Wort und Bild festzuhalten. Er begreift die Vermittlung von Kunst selbst als ästhetische Herausforderung. Perschon porträtiert mit ihrem Film Vorbilder, die zu einem eigenständigen, ja feministischen Ausdruck gefunden haben. Das schönste Kompliment macht sie ihnen damit, dass sie ihrer Maxime des Eigensinns folgt.“ der standard

„Ein fulminantes Porträt feministischer Kunstpionierinnen aus Wien. Die Idee, ein dokumentarisches Experiment über fünf visionäre österreichische Künstlerinnen als Kollaboration mit diesen entstehen zu lassen, ist ebenso gut wie selten; denn sie erfordert nicht nur Intelligenz und Respekt, sondern auch ein gewisses Maß an Demut. Die Filmemacherin Christiana Perschon besitzt all dies.” profil

„Sie sind um das Jahr 1940 geboren und machen Kunst: für ihren Film Sie ist der andere Blick hat Christiana Perschon fünf Künstlerinnen erzählen lassen, wie sie trotz massiver Widerstände und Verhinderungsmaßnahmen als Frauen arbeiten konnten.” Radio FM4 Homebase

„Sie ist der andere Blick zeigt Positionen feministischer Kunst mit allem Respekt und mit aller Feinfühligkeit, die den fünf Pionierinnen gebührt.” Ö1 Kulturjournal

„Mit einer außergewöhnlichen Bildsprache, die den Kunstwerken ebenso viel Raum gibt wie den Künstlerinnen und diesen Raum immer wieder mit einer gekonnten Gesprächsstille unterbricht, die einem sowohl Zeit gibt, das Gesagte zu verarbeiten, als auch die Filmbilder und leisen Töne auf sich wirken zu lassen, gestaltet Christiana Perschon in ihrem Atelier ein faszinierendes Kaleidoskop an Geschichten, Bildern, Aussagen, Interpretationen und Betrachtungen.” ray Filmmagazin

„Sie ist der andere Blick von Christiana Perschon ist kein Film wie jeder andere. Er ist Dokument, künstlerische Annäherung, ein mit filmischen Mitteln geführter Dialog mit kunstschaffenden Frauen einer anderen Generation. Ein sehenswerter, nicht zuletzt genauso politischer wie poetischer Film.” Falter

„Ein filmisches Kunstwerk über fünf außergewöhnliche Künstlerinnen” Kek in Wien

„Weil Perschon ihre Kamera als Mittel begreift, gestalterische Möglichkeiten auszuloten, die Werke ihrer Protagonistinnen in filmische Bilder zu überführen, kreiert sie so mit den Künstlerinnen gemeinsam einen konstellativen, audiovisuellen Denkraum über Strategien der Aneignung. Sie ist der andere Blick durchdringt auf diese Weise sein Sujet, schafft exakt jene Resonanz und jenes Bewusstsein, das zur Sichtbarmachung notwendig ist.” Die Furche

„Ein wunderbarer, ermutigender, poetischer Film” Artemisia Blog

„Die junge Filmemacherin steht den porträtierten Künstlerinnen in der Aussagekraft ihrer Bildkompositionen um nichts nach. Wenn die Künstlerinnen ihre Arbeit erörtern oder während Perschon sie filmt, wird Kunst innerhalb von Kunst geschaffen.” Salzburger Nachrichten

Selbstermächtigung zum Selbstporträt. Falter

„Unaufdringlich und in kontrastreichem Schwarz-weiß ereignet sich ein kleines Filmwunder mit hoch-ästhetischen, langsam, minimalistischen Bildern abseits großer Inszenierungen.“ Volksstimme

Digital, 16 mm, Super 8, Augustin
SHE IS THE OTHER GAZE

A FILM BY CHRISTIANA PERSCHON

WITH
RENA TE BERTLMANN
LINDA CHRISTANELL
IRIS DOSTAL
LORE HEUERMANN
KARIN MACK
MARGOT PILZ

DIRECTOR, CONCEPT, CAMERA, EDIT, PRODUCER CHRISTIANA PERSCHON
SECOND CAMERA PATRICK WALLY
SOUND RECORDING PAUL PORENTA, STEFAN VOGLSINGER
16MM / SUPER 8 SHOTS, HAND PROCESSING CHRISTIANA PERSCHON
FILM LAB FILMKOOP WIEN, STEFANIE WEBERHOFER
FILM SCAN ÖSTERREICHISCHES FILM MUSEUM, STEFANIE ZINGL
MAKE UP (MARGOT PILZ) SOPHIE PALME
TRANSCRIPTION MARTHA WEICHER
TRANSLATION ERIKA DOUCETTE
COLOR MATTHIAS TOMASI
FOLEY ARTIST N ILS KIRCHHOFF
SOUND DESIGN KARIM WETH
SOUND RE-RECORDING ALEXANDER KOLLER
DIGITAL MASTERING THE GRAND POST, TANJA HÖGL

SUPPORTED BY BUNDESKANLZERAMT ÖSTERREICH, WIEN KULTUR,
LAND NIEDERÖSTERREICH KULTUR, STADTGEMEINDE BADEN, THEODOR KÖRNER PREIS
BIography

Christiana Perschon is an artist and filmmaker based in Vienna. Her films are created collaboratively with her protagonists in a setting where interaction defines the imagery while her camera acts as the receiver of the gaze in an intergenerational dialogue. She completed her studies in Art and Film at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She worked for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, Austrian Audiovisual Archive, Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institute for History and Society and curated 2018 „In Person: Barbara Hammer“ for the Austrian Filmmuseum. Perschon’s work has received several awards and grants (Best Camera Documentary Film/Diagonale 2019, Theodor Körner Preis 2018, Best Austrian Short Film/Vienna Shorts 2014) and has been shown at venues such as Blickle Kino Belvedere 21, mumok Kino, Viennale (AT), Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (DE), Jihlava IDFF (CZ), Visions du Réel (CH), Edinburgh International Film Festival (UK), Cork Film Festival (IRL), New Horizons Wroclaw (PL).

FILMOGRAPHY [SELECTION]

She is the other gaze
2018, 90 min, Verleih: Filmgarten, Vertrieb: sixpackfilm
Best Camera Documentary Film Diagonale 2019
Theodor Körner Preis 2018

it is not me, it is an image of me
2018, 9 min, Verleih: sixpackfilm, Light Cone, Paris

Double 8
2016, 3 min, Verleih: sixpackfilm, Light Cone, Paris

Ghost Copy
2016, 2 min, Verleih: sixpackfilm, Light Cone, Paris

Noema
2014, 30 min, Verleih: sixpackfilm, Light Cone, Paris
Best Austrian Short Film, Vienna Shorts 2014
Audience Award, Vienna Shorts 2014
Youth Jury Award, Vienna Shorts 2014
Audience Award, dotdotdot Kurzfilmpfestival 2017