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Manon
Hotel Dolores
*Aargauer Kunsthaus
29.1.–25.4.2011

English

Manon, the Swiss pioneer of artistic staging and role-playing, offers a taste of her most recent work at the Aargauer Kunsthaus, presenting for the first time a selection of large-size photographs from her photo series titled *Hotel Dolores*, which currently comprises about 170 pictures. The abandoned spa hotels in the Aargau town of Baden provide the setting in which the artist examines, with her camera, the fleetingness of our existence. In the photo series, the derelict spaces merge with the artistic mise-en-scène to create open-ended narratives.

Owing to a lack of demand, the former spa hotels "Verena-hof," "Ochsen" and "Bären" in the spa district of Baden have been vacant for years. The abandoned and, in some cases, condemned structures are relics of a time in the 19th and early 20th centuries when Baden was a spa resort of international renown. Prominent figures such as William Turner, Gottfried Keller and Hermann Hesse were among the spa guests. In recent decades it lost its lustre as a resort and the hotels were shut down, some of them overnight.

Fascinated by the faded splendour of yore and the particular aura of the spa hotels, these structures provide Manon both with inspiration and with a setting for her photographic stagings. Every week for over two years now the artist spends time at the spa hotels, undaunted by cold, dust, dirt and the lack of electricity and light. Currently comprising 170 photographs, her photo series *Hotel Dolores* is a work in progress, which the artist hopes to be able to complete before the spa district is redeveloped.

Thematically, *Hotel Dolores* combines all the elements that are characteristic for Manon's oeuvre: the construction of female identity and social determination, the play with seduction and veiling, power and impotence, as well as the antagonistic forces of youth mania and transience. Extracts from earlier photo series, as well as objects from installations and props from past performances, recur in *Hotel Dolores*. The work's theme is implicit in its title: *Hotel Dolores* is concerned with the pain and anguish over the transience of our existence, the fleetingness of which matches that of a traveller's layover in a hotel. In the atmospheric and history-charged spaces of the spa hotels Manon uses the camera to stage and create ambiguous images. The resulting photographs do not merely project images of abjectness and decay, but also offer cheerful and frivolous glimpses of Manon's artistic world.

Manon was born in Berne in 1946 and lives and works in Zurich. In the 1960s she attended the school of applied arts in St. Gallen and acting school in Zurich. At this time she also adopted the artist's name Manon. 1974 saw her debut as an artist in the Zurich art world with the installation *Das lachsfarbene Boudoir*. In the early 1970s she garnered attention nationally as well as internationally with her performances, installations and staged photographs

dealing with issues of identity and the construction of gender roles. In creating the persona of Manon, she turns herself into a projection surface and uses her own body as material for her art, making it difficult to distinguish between her life and her work. During a longer stay in Paris she created major photo series such as *Dame au crâne rasé* (1978) and *Ball der Einsamkeiten* (1980). In 1990, after a creative break of several years, Manon created the installation *Damenzimmer* and the photo series *Künstler Eingang*, taking part in several exhibitions. Since the 1990s the artist has been exploring the subject of life's transience in symbolic installations such as *Die Philosophie im Boudoir* (1993) and in the photo series such as *Forever Young* (1999) and *Einst war sie Miss Rimini* (2003).

Curator: Madeleine Schuppli

Edition

Limited artist's edition issued by the Aargauischer Kunstverein: Manon, photograph from the photo series *Hotel Dolores*, 2008–10. Edition of 25 (plus 5 AP). CHF 500.– (unframed) / CHF 400.– for Members of the Aargauischer Kunstverein / CHF 350.– for sponsors of the Aargauischer Kunstverein. For additional information please refer to the museum ticket counter.

Programme of supporting events

Artist's Talk
Thursday 31 March 6.30 pm
Manon in conversation with Claudia Spinelli, Director Kunstpraum Baden, and Madeleine Schuppli, Director Aargauer Kunsthaus. Followed by a reception in the foyer

For additional details regarding this and other events, as well as to the exhibition and the art education programme, please refer to the exhibition flyer or visit our website at www.aargauerkunsthau.ch

Opening hours

Tue – Sun 10 am – 5 pm
Thu 10 am – 8 pm

Images:

Manon
From the photo series *Hotel Dolores* 2009 / 2010
Courtesy the artist
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