

AC- 2010

AESCHLIMANN CORTI STIPENDIUM
DER BERNISCHEN KUNSTGESELLSCHAFT

AC 2010 AESCHLIMANN CORTI SCHOLARSHIP
AWARDED BY THE BERNISCHEKUNSTGESELLSCHAFT



AC 2010 MAIN PRIZE

SOPHISTICATED VIEW OF CAIRO'S SPATIAL STRATA

„C.Scapes“ is the title of Maia Gusberty's video that has been awarded the AC 2010 Main Prize. „C.“ stands for Cairo, the city of which the artist presents a panorama evolved from her precise observations and experiences of the Egyptian capital, and from her strong concept. These are special images of metropolitan public spaces and the people who live there – who moreover are a special voice.

We are drawn in; we accept being made to watch as images and objects emerge one by one; we begin to comprehend what **Maia Gusberty** (*1971) presents to our gaze in her double video „C.Scapes“.

„C.“ stands for Cairo. So we are drawn into the Egyptian capital; into the shimmering of the skyline that intimates the nearby desert; into distant but real streets; into spaces that only reveal themselves to us in our imagination. Indeed, „C.Scapes“ is a complex, multi-spatial piece. This is no hasty snapshot, no rehash of touristy clichés of this vibrant city. These views are not what you would expect when you hear the word „Cairo“: there are no mosques, no picturesque bazaars, no pyramids; there is no river Nile, no congested traffic.

By method of exclusion The artist evidently knows her city. She is fascinated – yet does not succumb to its exotic pull. It was in 2006/2007 that she was in Cairo on a Pro Helvetia scholarship and she has been back many times. Having lived in an informal district – the only European anywhere around – and in a neighbourhood among rich foreigners, she has seen many of the city's diverse aspects, including threatening ones: overpopulation, overcrowding, police, state of emergency.

She was wondering – so she tells me – how to capture in images this disjointed, inhomogeneous construct. How to talk about „C.“ without falling into the trap of „social kitsch“ that blights so many recent, well-meaning video pieces focusing on third-world conurbations.

So Maia Gusberty really started by a process of exclusion: she would tell no slum stories and she was aware of the virtual impossibility of filming in the street, even more so as she was going to work with two parallel but slightly disaligned cameras: she would have had to obtain permits and, despite the anonymity afforded by the big city, people might have responded with displeasure, or even aggressively. And: how could she possibly capture the vast spectrum of social diversity, the huge variety of social, architectural and urbanistic spaces?

The video artist opted for an indirect approach, using distance to create intimacy. Her method was to use two cameras on the visual plane to produce parallel, but almost imperceptibly disaligned perspectives, resulting in a slight irritation. She combined fifteen views from private spaces with some ten panoramic views, filming

from raised viewpoints and from windows in private homes. This required an unbelievable amount of research, and reliable help when it came to persuading individuals to allow her and her team access to their home, to accept this intrusion into their social environments; or in negotiations with caretakers for permission to film from the tops of high-rise buildings and roofs.

One panorama – five levels The first and visible level, then, are the citiscapes – tranquil, unspectacular, affecting, slow. The second level is the language: speaking in the off, people think aloud about public space. Their statements, transcribed and translated from Arabic into English, appear in subtitles, providing the third – topographic – level.

The statements about public space, which in these images appears at a distance and – paradoxically – from many private spaces, these statements provide a fourth level, which is actually the centre of „C.Scapes“. It is here that those public spaces make an appearance – or at least the subject matter of the interviewees' thoughts and associations: twelve hours of interviews that Gusberty distilled into half an hour.

What remains is a vast range of opinions that in the fifth level insinuate themselves into the viewers' imaginations, which conjure up urban spaces and near-automatic back-references to our own environments.

From street stalls to the river Nile In the „C.Scapes“ interviews, public spaces indirectly occur as:

- places of anonymity that allow free and uninhibited movement.
- places ruled by strict conventions that demand equally strict consideration.
- places of work, such as street stalls.
- meeting places that provide opportunities for gossip and discussion.
- places of leisure and recreation, such as the parks along the Nile river – which, however, become places of restriction because so many of their users do not wish to accept any restrictions.
- extraordinary places, such as the Pyramids.
- places of dense crowds and the juggernaut of traffic.
- places of retreat, such as mosques and churches.

So it is that all these places – and many more – are evoked by Gusberty's images. What emerges is a subtle and ultimately narrative portrait of „C.“, and of all the spaces that make „C.“ what it is. Individuals are present as denizens of the city even if the video images only ever show one single person, and from a great distance. It is a portrait of a city and its people in which no people are depicted. This is the highly distinctive feature and impressive singularity of „C.Scapes“.

Show what cannot be shown „C.Scapes“ is Gusberti’s first such video. The artist states that this is the first of her works in which content and message play such a central part. Her previous video pieces, most of which were created in Vienna, were a great deal more formal. Take „air.E“ (2001), recorded during a ride on a tramway, which focuses on the graphic element of the electric overhead cables’ criss-crossing lines. The documentation „infravoid.vid“ (2005) is about empty urban spaces, interstices between elements of transport infrastructure such as freeway intersections. „Sunday-files“ presents recordings taken by CCTV cameras on Sundays – empty offices and production facilities.

In 2009 the artist attended a workshop in Birzeit/Ramallah, Palestine. This resulted in the documentation, „UN Resolutions“: a collection of all the resolutions on the conflict between Israel and Palestine taken between 1948 and 2009 – 221 pages in two volumes.

These few examples show the focal points of Gusberti’s interest: interstices – be they urbanistic, political or social. Just as in „C.Scapes“, she looks at „the other“ – she uses a different view. One question, then, is crucial in terms of this artist’s perception and aesthetics: „How can I show and talk about something I can only show indirectly?“ She is not concerned with what is evident, or what lies in the centre. And that is precisely why she aims at the heart of the matter.

Konrad Tobler

© Translation from German, Dec. 2010: Margret Powell-Joss • www.powelltrans.ch

EDITORIAL

Liebe Leserin, lieber Leser

AC 2010 steht für Aeschlimann Corti 2010. Jährlich schreibt die Bernische Kunstgesellschaft BKG den Stipendiumswettbewerb für freie Kunst aus, das AC Stipendium. Eine autonome fünfköpfige Jury prüft die Werke von Kunstschaffenden unter 40 Jahren, die im Kanton Bern wohnhaft oder heimatberechtigt sind. Die Jury spricht Preise und Förderbeiträge.

Mit dieser Publikation geht die BKG neue Wege: Jährlich würdigt von nun an die AC Zeitung die ausgezeichneten Kunstschaffenden und gibt ihnen eine Dokumentation in die Hand. Das AC Stipendium stellt sich damit als gezieltes Förderinstrument ganz in den Dienst der jüngeren Kunst.

Die AC Zeitung soll zudem die Bedeutung unseres Stipendiums hervorheben. Denn dieses ist im nationalen Vergleich einer der bestdotierten privaten Förderpreise. Den Grundstein dazu legten zwei Frauen: Louise Aeschlimann (1843 bis 1910) und Margareta Corti (1899 bis 1989). Seit 1942 wurden 195 Künstlerinnen und Künstler mit einem AC Stipendium ausgezeichnet.

Dank umsichtigem Haushalten mit den gestifteten Geldern wurde ein Vermögen angehäuft, das uns erlaubt, jährlich 70000 Franken an Stipendien zu vergeben. Unser besonderer Dank gilt dem ehemaligen BKG-Präsidenten Jobst Wagner, der seit geraumer Zeit und in Zukunft privat dazu beiträgt, dass diese Summe gewährleistet ist. Dank gilt auch allen Institutionen und Gönnern, die das AC Stipendium unterstützen.

Alex Wassmer

Präsident der Bernischen Kunstgesellschaft
und der Stiftung Aeschlimann Corti

Titelseite:

Maia Gusberti «C.Scapes»

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Gezeigt werden prämierte Werke und eine Auswahl eingereicherter Arbeiten, kuratiert von **Fanni Fetzer** (Leiterin Kunsthaus Langenthal).

Ausstellungsassistenz: **Annick Haldemann** (Leitung administrative Verwaltung AC).

INFORMATIONEN

Ausstellungsort 2010

Kunsthaus Langenthal
Marktgasse 13
CH-4900 Langenthal
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Öffnungszeiten

Mittwoch & Donnerstag 14-17 Uhr
Freitag 14-19 Uhr
Samstag & Sonntag 10-17 Uhr

Vernissage

31. März 2010, 19 Uhr

Ausstellungsdauer

1. bis 25. April 2010

AC Jurymitglieder 2010

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Ganz herzlich sei an dieser Stelle Annick Haldemann für die Leitung der administrativen Verwaltung des Aeschlimann Corti Stipendiums gedankt.

DANK

Das Aeschlimann Corti Stipendium der Bernischen Kunstgesellschaft wird getragen von der Aeschlimann Corti Stiftung und unterstützt von Jobst Wagner (Präsident der BKG von 1994 bis 2005), vom Kanton Bern, der Stadt Bern, der Bürgergemeinde Bern, der Valiant Bank und privaten Stiftern.



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Impressum

Herausgeberin

Bernische Kunstgesellschaft BKG

Idee und Konzept

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Redaktion

Susanne Friedli, Konrad Tobler

Text

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Foto

© 2010 David Aebi

Gestaltung

schwarzenbeck.ch

Lithografie & Druck

Schlaefli & Maurer AG, Interlaken

Auflage

3000 Exemplare

April 2010