

Performance by Josef Ka

as part of the opening of the exhibition

DAS ANDERE LAZARETT

by Claudia Schumann

at

Heartfulness Street Gallery

Lazarettgasse 9

curated by Renate Kordon

Sunday 10 Nov. 2024

5-5:30 p.m.

Pavement and sidewalk stairway in front of the gallery

Surrounded by the night, two assistants holding small burning torches take their positions on either side of a short sidewalk stairway. A figure in a black dress emerges from the darkness of the wall of the building – barefoot, with shaven head, face powdered white – a ‘white clown’ – approaches the stairway with measured steps... the guests, in warm coats and caps, gather around in a semicircle; it is only 4 degrees Celsius.

Josef Ka, hands outstretched, carries a rolled-up cloth – the roll of fabric forms an arch over her head and is also rests on it – a solemn, silent, quasi crowned apparition, sacral movement and gesture...

stopping at the threshold of the sidewalk, laying the roll at her feet, kneeling on the ground, pausing - slowly unrolling the cloth before her, and on down the stairway - one by one, steeply down the remaining steps, supported by her knees, her head and her arms reaching diagonally downwards...

the white cloth, two metres wide, covering the width of the stairway, reveals wildly distributed black streaks, dark swelling spots, as it unfolds ... finally, it lies unfurled from top to bottom - an expressively stained, splattered expanse of fabric ...

at the bottom of the stairs, the figure now squats at the end of the cloth... pausing, then slowly baring the upper body, kneeling, bending all the way forward, stretching out across the cloth, pausing - covering the body with the cloth...slowly wrapping the body in the cloth...

then - only feet and head end visible - rolling up, hoisting up onto the bottom step, pausing... overcoming the next step up as well, and up it goes, step by step... without excessive effort, only the stretched out feet and the moving elbows inside are visible, the cocoon-like figuration creeps and glides back up the stairs –

the torches have gone out, the bystanders remain in suspense and amazement - how will this end?? - the top step and the pavement have finally been reached - the bundle, all rolled up, now lying across the asphalt, on level ground, rolls slowly on, pauses, moves on - towards the edge of the pavement, comes to a halt at the curb where it protrudes a little over the gutter ..

silence, immobility, frozen calm - only after a long pause does an arm emerge from the bundle, then a head and shoulder - leaning and straightening up to a kneeling position, - still largely enveloped, the figure rises, walks back to the dark wall, stands still, sits down in a niche. The endapplause, the scene dissolves.

Attempt at an Interpretation

The human being appears – stylized and pure, abstract and almost disembodied, marked in noble black and white, holding a bundle in its hands shaped like a solemn arch above its head...

This figuration is transformed – the bundle moults – pushed forward and unrolled on the ground by the figure, step by step – a dramatic parcours of black and white splashes, a score running ahead which the figure is compelled to follow, creeping and unrolling and unravelling it ever further down...

but an unexpected turn-around happens, in that the bare outstretched body rolls itself up in the huge, eerie, unfolded sheet, wraps itself up snugly, spinning a cocoon – only to reverse, from the inside, the dramatically spooled out course of life into an almost weightless ascending movement, developing its own momentum, winding upward while folding in, overcoming threshold over threshold, refuting gravity...

on level ground, the drama ebbs into silent oneness – the being has brought its dark fateful flag as a design (initially unrecognizable) along with it from the very beginning and unwound it laboriously over time, but, in complete fervent acceptance transformed it into something different - dis-guised in apparel of an entirely different kind in which the body with its attributes initially disappears – only to come forth entirely transformed – when the bare arm and upper body emerged from the hermetic roll, the figure appeared to me to be much much larger, more powerful than in the beginning...

moreover, this act of Josef Ka could also be read as a commentarial variation, a spatialisation of Claudia Schuman's photographic intervention in the gallery windows – where it is also – in accentuated black and white and in stylised imprints and re-imprints of corporeal existence, about the inscription of fate into the physical – whereby the one photo in the window display is curiously rolled up and latently stands as a figure-like stele – an apparently related previous nascent state of the spatiotemporal performance.

otto kapfinger

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english translation

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