

Press release

Heike Baranowsky
Ubehebe

February 13 – March 20, 2010
Opening: Friday, February 12, 2010, 6 – 9 pm
Gallery hours: Tu – Sat, 11 am – 6 pm

During the Berlinale: February 13 – 21, Mo – Su, 10 am – 6 pm

Galerie Barbara Weiss is pleased to present Heike Baranowsky's fifth solo show, as a part of Forum Expanded, a program of the 60th Berlin International Film Festival. Born in 1966, Baranowsky is known as a video artist with a unique visual language, a language that emphasizes stillness and tranquillity and that is able to open up new, confusing aspects of how we perceive a moving image with the most minimal of measures. In Baranowsky's videos, a swimmer, for instance, can move in her lane for minutes, without taking so much as a single gasp for air. Or cyclists can race at different speeds without ever outpacing each other. With characteristic precision and with an intense concentration on the image's atmosphere, the artist explores themes, such as the power of suggestion of moving images, the manipulation of meaning by media, or technology's influence on our understanding of reality. As her friend and colleague Jack Goldstein once said, she does so with an approach that "is seemingly so casual, that the act of controlling the image is visually almost invisible." But at the same time, Baranowsky's works are never a pure critique of image technology; in the gap between media and reality she always finds a surplus of experience as well.

In "pêche" (2009), two screens display parallel, 11 minutes long loops, which feature the artist herself, holding her thirteen month old daughter Laylah in her arms while she splashes around in a big gold fish bowl. The motif stems from the short film "La pêche aux poissons rouges", by the brothers Lumière, which premiered in December 1895 in Paris and is an integral part of the very beginning of the history of film. It's easy to recognize that the two films are separated by more than a hundred years of technological advancement: While the Lumières had to film outside due to their technical limitations, Baranowsky shot her videos inside her studio as well as outside in a park in Berlin. While the original is a silent movie, "pêche" is dubbed with a lyrical soundscape that just seems to belong to the images. The videos have been artificially depleted of all color with the exception of the orange-like red of the gold fish and the green of the trees in the park. And while the video shot outside follows a linear pattern, the images showing the artist and her daughter inside the studio run backward and forward in rotation. Most of these systematic technical manipulations are so subtle that one only notices them after watching the videos for quite a while. "As we automatically believe in the truth of a photograph, we are also intuitively convinced of the reality of the moving image," the artist explains. Isn't it surprising how easily we succumb to this viewing pattern, regardless of how obviously artificial today's HD-dreamscapes are?

The video installation "Racetrack" (2010) features three large-sized projections reflecting that basic conundrum of media technology as well. Each of the three loops consists of roughly 1000, individually shot photographs of the breathtaking landscape of Racetrack Playa, a plateau in California's Death Valley National Park. The human eye's persistence of vision makes the arrangement of the individual frames seem like a moving image, and this is true for every movie and every video. But using a stop/motion effect, Baranowsky is able to redirect our attention precisely to that fact. What at first seems like an inconspicuous pulse becomes a rhythm that comes to dominate the installation the longer one watches.

"Racetrack" centers around the sailing stone of Racetrack Playa, which play a significant role in the local mythology of the Death Valley, since from time to time they move over the ground and leave visible traces – a phenomenon that has not yet been fully scientifically explained. Baranowsky's video circles these stones and uses them like modules in a masterly composed piece of music: The images are repeated, mirrored, played forward and backward, syncopated, zoomed in or out. A seemingly futuristic soundscape that suggests the sounds of wind and desert in one moment and a buzzing in one's ears the next, enhances the hauntingly poetic effect of the work. And if one squints, the piece might actually give the impression that the stones of Racetrack Playa are moving.

Three photos of the Ubehebe Crater complement the video installations and give the show its name. The Ubehebe is a large volcanic crater in the Death Valley National Park. Named such by Native Americans, "Ubehebe" means "big basket in the rock". By subtly retouching the photos and mirroring certain elements in them, Baranowsky manages to transform the concave basket shape of the crater to a convex pictorial element, which looks like a hill. The landscape emerging from these photos literally oscillates between fantasy and reality. As in most of her works, the artist provokes conflicting perceptions of reality in the viewer here as well, by utilizing his or her natural inclination to only attribute meaning to what the image shows rather than to the medium itself, which is always prone to manipulation. Image, space and time – for Heike Baranowsky these are phenomena that have a precarious relation to reality, and that make the viewer succumb to his or her pleasure of experiencing them for just that reason.

Daniel Schreiber

