

## A GAME BETWEEN I AND ME

Asked about why he was so anxious to avoid anything traditional in his artistic practice, Marcel Duchamp in an interview in 1962 stated that he was rather trying to invent than merely expressing himself: "My intention was always to get away from myself, though I know perfectly well that I was using myself. Call it a little game between I and me". Most obvious does this "little game" become in Man Ray's famous portrait of Marcel Duchamp as his female alter ego Rose Sélavy. What might seem like a paradox at first sight therefore points to the core of any kind of performative practice in which the artist him- or herself also functions as the main performer. It is exactly this relationship between the two personae that Kerstin Honeit in her current exhibition at balzer projects in Basel, whose title refers to the Duchamp quote, now puts in focus. The show combines four works from a period of four years (2009-2013), in which the artist adopts and performs different roles and voices for the camera, and by that challenges our perception of what the self is.

The earliest piece, the photo series *Becoming 10* (2009/2010), is the most openly autobiographic. It shows Honeit posing as multiple male and female Berlin characters in their urban surroundings. At the same time they relate to her nine half-sisters and brothers, none of whom she ever actually met. The photographs therefore function as a double-portrait – of a particular familiar and a societal structure. With *Becoming 10* she inscribes herself in both, and at the same time makes clear that all these images are her own creation.

In a similar way Honeit in *On & Off* (2010) appropriates a variety of different voices. In this video installation we see her standing in a theatre like setting in black suit, white shirt and black tie in a white cube like scenario, while she's lip-synching four female voices who share their experiences of attending their father's funerals. By letting these women speak through her body the artist becomes a quasi-neutral medium, their stories replace the autobiographical, and the very personal, subjective experience becomes a shared story.

For *Pigs in Progress* (2013) Honeit continues with the technique of borrowed voices. The work deals with gentrification in the centre of Berlin, humorously juxtaposed by the appearance of wild boars in the affluent suburban parts of the city. In the video, which is framed by two placards showing some of its protagonists wearing wild boar masks, the artist appears in the style of a moderator with suit and bow tie. Sitting on a red chair in the snow covered woods she lip-synchs a wide range of political viewpoints – the outcome of her own empirical research on the topic. Again, she lets others speak through her by using the queer technique of lip-synching. Therefore she takes on an ambiguous position.

In *Joint Property* (2013) the artist herself becomes a double. In it we see Honeit's body appearing against a dark background on two vertically installed screens, which evoke the idea of animated paintings, and here serve as the medium of another type of game. Both bodies interact with each other through the gallery space, alternating throwing objects and words from one side to the other. This interaction between the two doesn't follow a strict narrative,

but rather opens up a space that makes clear how language, as well as objects, attributed to us define our conception of the self. More evident than before, the spectator here literally stands right in the middle of the piece, between the "I" and "me".

Though Kerstin Honeit is very present in all of the works assembled in this show, the artist is always a persona that performs, that can change her appearance and switch through the whole gender-spectrum, and by that ultimately denies the idea of a single, fixed identity. The game that she plays isn't just a "little" one for her own sake or in relation to art's history, but rather a game that is influenced by very real, familiar, social and political circumstances. Even if the work shown in this exhibition is nurtured by aspects from the artist's life, it goes beyond the personal and demonstrates that Honeit's game between the "I" and "me" is always also determined by the "you" and "us".

Fiona McGovern, 2016

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