

Krobath

Marienstraße 10, D-10117 Berlin
office@galeriekrobath.at
www.galeriekrobath.at

SOFIE THORSEN – TOKYO MARCHING SONG

February 16th – April 17th, 2010

Opening: Saturday, February 13th, 2010, 6 p.m.

Opening hours: Tue – Sat 11 a.m. – 6. p.m.

*Dancing to Jazz, liquor in the wee hours,
And with the dawn a flood of tears for the dancer...
Vast Tokyo is too small for love,
Fashionable Asakusa, secret trysts...
Long-haired Marxist boys, ephemeral love of the moment...
Shall we see a movie, shall we drink tea, or rather shall we run away on
the Odawara express?*

In 1929, Shinpei Nakayama composed "Tokyo March", one of the first jazz songs of Japan, which sold more than 300 000 copies in the first year alone. Highly controversial and banned because of its representation of the Tokyo nightlife, the song became the anthem for the progressive Japanese modernism. The excerpt of the song quoted here goes back to the first, censored version. The more known and popular version of the text left out the Marxist content in order to focus more on the commercial typology of Japanese modernity. Japan's Jazz Age was a brief period of intense debate, curiosity, openness, and architectural and artistic freedom, in which fragments can still be read on the facades of Tokyo. Sofie Thorsen has taken the two usual English translations of the song title as a starting point to refer to the two main aspects of this exhibition. Whereas the exhibition title "Tokyo Marching Song" refers to the musical and therefore rhythmic connection of all parts of the exhibition, the work title "Tokyo March" is a reference to the dynamics inherent in this movement.

In this exhibition, Sofie Thorsen follows up on the layout drawings of the facades of the Ginza, the traditionally most innovative and still important shopping street of the city. They were made between 1930-31 by Kenkichi Yoshida, artist, designer and co-developer of Modernology, a theory that is based on the experiences of the great Kanto earthquake of 1923. The drawings are an analysis of the existing façade compositions and focus particularly on commercial – Western as well as Japanese – typologies, which appeared in the form of neon signs, signboards, and shop windows and which are made readable in an abbreviation. Similar to the later Pop art, commercial life was seen as a feature, as an experimental field, and last but not least, as a stage for modern life. With the camera, Thorsen zooms into these streets, takes details, enlarges, reduces again, showing graphic overlays as well as architectural details, which are characterized by a huge variation. The individual images are shown in the slide installation "Tokyo March", which analogous to the lyrics consists of four chapters played in different rhythms. The second focal point of the slide installation reassembles the photographic archive material further deciphering the meaning of the drawings. The pictures are so blended into each other that they set the architecture in motion. Thorsen breaks out the structures behind the abstraction in order to track down the architectural ideas of this drawn row of houses. Only the individual architectural detail of the façade, singular and in itself significant, is in b/w lit on the wall doubling the concept of the façade. This complex image plane is not only a reconstruction of the facts, but makes the readable and non-readable façade mutually interpretable.

The "Signboard" architecture (Kanban Kenchiku), created after the earthquake of 1923, consists mainly of a small insignificant building with an elaborate, mostly colored façade facing the street. Thus the drawings in the second part of the exhibition are related to still existing houses, which, in analogy to the façades of the drawings by Yoshida, evince the new architectural typology of the time. Thorsen prescinds this architecture and identifies certain elements of the façade with colors, creating a two-dimensional ensemble of basic shapes, which from today's perspective ties in with the Modernology of the 1920s. Through the drawing, seen as an analytical element that extracts and makes visible the different levels or overlays of architecture, she highlights the exemplary character of the individual architectures.

A print in the entrance area of the gallery showing dance club tickets of the '20s, functions as a prologue to the exhibition. Executed in an almost Dadaist fashion combined with Japanese elements, this reference material introduces a certain rhythm, then to be discovered in the exhibition's architecture and the individual works. The rhythm of the slide projector is carried on in the drawings suggesting movement determined by their colors, their various shapes, and the black walls they are mounted on. The updating and re-presentation of history finds its formally adequate form so that the given topic can be translated into the present.

How are cultural, economic, and political parameters inscribed in urban, spatial or architectural design? To pursue this question, the exhibition brings together three different narrative levels that like a post-modern novel open up the original drawings, situating them in a cultural and historical context. The allegorical level of Japanese Modernology is translated into the semiotic landscape of Post-modernity. They combine past and present, reality and fiction, in order to expose the cultural circumstances behind the pictures as well as to allow the reinterpretation of built history. The built space is always revealed as a political space that implies certain orders, values and relationships between people opening up desired models and depicting a vision of society.

Text: Bettina Steinbrügge

Sofie Thorsen, born 1971 in Århus, Denmark. Lives and works in Vienna.

Solo Exhibitions (Selection): 2010 Krobath, Berlin. 2009 *The Colourless Island*, The Aarhus Art Building, Århus, Krobath, Vienna. 2008 *Wenn wir da sind*, Projekt Freizeichen, Müzzuschlag. 2007 *Wandmalerei*, Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, *Landmark*, Oberleiserberg, Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Niederösterreich. 2005 *162 von 172 Häusern stehen an der Hauptstraße...*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig. *The Golden Castle That Hung in the Air*, Raster, Warsaw. 1998 *Window sill*, rum 46, Århus (with Elsebeth Jørgensen), *Den Store Perlekæde*, Kunstakademiets Udstillingsted, Copenhagen.

Group Exhibitions (Selection): 2009 *PROVISORISCHES YOGA*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, *Forschungsstationen*, Kunstverein Langenhagen e.V., Langenhagen, *FIFTY FIFTY Kunst im Dialog mit den 50er-Jahren*, WIEN MUSEUM Karlsplatz, Vienna, *STILL / MOVING / STILL – Internationaal VIDEO FOTO festival KNOCKE HEIST*, Cultuurcentrum Knokke-Heist, Belgium. 2008 *The Artist as Troublemaker*, ACF ny - Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, *Wunderkammer Lüneburg - Jahresgaben 2008*, Halle für Kunst, Lueneburg, *Overdragelse*, Overgaden. Institut for Samtidskunst, Copenhagen, *Bela Kolárová, Falke Pisano, Janice Kerbel, Sofie Thorsen*, Galerie Krobath Wimmer, Vienna, *Nothing to Declare - 4. Triennale Zeitgenössische Kunst Oberschwaben*, Zeppelin Museum, Friedrichshafen. 2007 *NMWA's 20th Anniversary Festival of Women's Film & Media Arts*, NMWA, Washington DC. 2006 *STORYLINES*, Centre d'art Passerelle, Brest, Kunstraum München, Munich, Kunstverein Goettingen, *10. Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur*, *Annual San Diego Women Film Festival*, San Diego, *15. dokumentART*, Neubrandenburg, *Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien? Beziehungen zwischen Tourismus, Neokolonialismus und Migration. Drittes Kapitel*, Shedhalle, Zurich, *Crossing Europe 06*, Linz, *Best of Diagonale*, Graz, *Diagonale 06 – Festival des Österreichischen Films*, Graz. 2005 *Scanbul Connection*, Istanbul, *GU.Sicht - Graz Umgebung– Produktion einer Rurbanen Landschaft*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, *STORYLINES*, Public>, Paris, *Moving Target*, Kluuvi Gallery, Helsinki (with Mads Lynnerup), *Festival der Regionen*, Oberösterreich, *TRAVELLING EYE – fotografie im urlaub*, Quartier 21 im MQ, Vienna (mit Elsebeth Jørgensen), *Opacity*, UKS, Oslo.