

Frieda Schumann, 186, Chem. de Provence, F.06250 Mougins

Press-Release on the work of Frieda Schumann

The story is a little complicated: Frieda Schumann is a young German artist, born in Switzerland of a German father and an Italian mother, living in France, who often uses English to express her feelings about life and art. Then things are made easier by the artist, former student of the Villa Arson, graduated in 1992, who draws the material of her work from her manifold cultural influences and from her belonging to a women's world. For this purpose, her installations usually create a secret mixture between public and personal history, by means of references to the little or big worries of life and to domestic everyday-life. All this without any reference to the inevitable eternal feminine, and without any feminist-type of claim.

The repertory and treatment of the means of expression employed evidently recall Rosemarie Trockel's work, especially in the ironic repetition of decorative patterns, the re-creation of hospitable interiors, and above all the multi-field technical research and the images thus obtained. Nevertheless, Schumann's critical approach to what we may call the "masculine universe" is much more mitigated than Rosemarie Trockel's. The reason for this sense of measure is surely due to a subtle difference of culture and of generation.

The use of embroidery, of feminine garments and clothing items, of crockery and furniture may be considered as symptomatic of two of the current tendencies:- first of all the irruption of women on the international art scene, and also the recycling of images and media as theorised by Nicholas Bourriaud. In an over-productive and over-consuming era, which reveals the problem of waste and of ecology, Schumann makes use of recuperated objects, mostly items from her own house, with which she has created a familiar and/or affective link. Showing such objects in an exhibition space amounts to investing them with a more general meaning by replacing them inside the logic of the installation they are part of, and by raising them to the level of artwork.

People who have seen the *Passants du Phalanstère* exhibition at the Villa Arson last summer may have noticed that the three works by Frieda Schumann that were on show functioned exactly as picture-puzzles in as far as they intrigued the onlooker while at the same time supplying him with the keys to their own reading, and their meaning could finally be grasped by the spectator endowed with insight. Thus the floor-installation that showed a Chanel handbag and the memories of Giulio Andreotti covered by a black veil could be seen as a picture representing Italy. The black veil, symbolising hidden glances, was perniciously cast upon a book which has long been found out by Italian press to be a string of lies. At the same time, the accessories of womanly mourning brought us back once again to the question of nowadays femininity.

The fake chanel jacket hanging on a cheap coat-rack, which bears the punk slogan "I'll do my worst" embroidered on the back, like a promise or a threat, can be seen as an inversion of one of Sylvie Fleury's "vanities". If wearing an expensive styled tailor-suit means to be dominated by luxury, to wear an imitation means to be twice as much alienated, by poverty and by richness-dictated cheapness.

Finally, the last of these critical hieroglyphs undoubtedly contains the originality itself of Frieda Schumann's work, the hybridisation between ready-made and its opposite, the handcrafted object. Upon a table covered with a nice red and white oilcloth, stood a huge bottle of wine roughly sculpted into wood in the manner of Baselitz or of Balkenhol. On the label the word Ruffiano "hypocrite", created a play on words with a popular brand of Chianti wine. Also related to the reading of Andreotti's book, this stone-like intallation spoke through the impossibility of its situation - wood being the least appropriate material to represent glass - of all the cliches of a bon vivant and touristic Italy where the tourist, incapable of reading the picture-puzzle is tossed in a blanket by an over-symbolic reading. As one can see the strength of this work lays in the manual process of elaboration which, by means of its incongruity, operates like a ready-made by placing the concept above the means of its actualisation.

Catherine Macchi