

Reality and deception

Footloose

22 September -18 November

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Two women are sitting at a kitchen table, having breakfast. They look very much alike, probably they are twin sisters. One of them is gesticulating, telling a story, while the other one is listening and chewing on her slice of bread. The photo seems to be a snapshot: The front of the table is cut off, and neither of the women is caught in a very favourable pose. It is the kind of photo you could find in a family album.

But you won't. The picture belongs to the series "Living Together" created by Norwegian artist Vibeke Tandberg in 1996, and none of the above assumptions are right: The women are not twin sisters, actually both are the artist herself who took two single pictures and combined them in a photo montage. There has never been a conversation, and the snapshot character is a deliberate means of adding realism to the manipulated scene.



Runa Islam

Fragment uit de film "Dead Time" (2000)





Tandberg
Uit de serie "Living Together"

The series which supposedly documents the family life of two sisters forms part of the exhibition "Footloose" at the Stedelijk Museum. The show presents works by three young female photo- and video-artists who all investigate the possibilities of manipulation in their work. While Vibeke Tandberg (b. 1967) is fascinated by the dialectics of documentation and fiction, or rather reality and deception, Runa Islam (b. 1970) devotes herself to deconstructing cinematic narratives. Her work "Tuin" (1998) re-enacts a famous scene from Fassbinder's movie "Martha", a 360 degree shot circling around a couple in a garden. Islam takes the scene apart and presents it from three different angles on three canvasses, commenting on the role of the director as well as on the audience's habitual way of following narratives and interpreting them. This becomes even clearer in her film "Dead Time" (2000), which is assembled from nearly static pictures, but nevertheless entices the viewer to follow an alleged storyline - which in the end leads nowhere.



Jouvre
work "untitled (Personages with Marie Mendy)" (1994/1996)

Valérie Jouve (b. 1964) is the third artist in the show. Her photos deal with the interaction of people and urban space, with the role of architecture as a stage set for human beings in motion. Like Tandberg's supposed family photos, they seem to be snapshots, but are in fact carefully planned. In Jouve's works, manipulation is not just a technical method of touching up reality - like in her photos of a traffic jam, in which the cars are stacked impossibly close behind each other -, but also a very real action sometimes necessary to enhance the aesthetic value of the picture: For her work "untitled (Personnages with Marie Mendy)" (1994/1996), which shows a laughing coloured woman walking past a car dealer's shop, she asked the owner of the shop to place a specific white car without number plate in the entrance. Her pictures are never products of coincidence, but are preceded by a lot of preparation.

Of course manipulation is not the only subject the artists deal with, and mostly it is not even their main interest. But besides the choice of medium, it is the combining element between the very different creations of Tandberg, Islam and Jouve. The result of the manipulations is a deceptive quality common to many of the works on show: At first glance, they seem to be something which they are not, their real identity is only revealed if the spectator starts questioning what he sees. The works require a great deal of attention and close inspection by the viewer. Through the means of manipulation, Tandberg, Islam and Jouve show how easily we can be fooled by our expectations.

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*Tuesday to Friday: 11.00 - 18.00 hours
Saturday and Sunday: 10.00 - 18.00 hours*