

SOPHIE CALLE - UN CERTAIN REGARD

08.06.-25.08.2019

Fotomuseum Winterthur

Sophie Calle (b. 1953, Paris) is a conceptual artist, writer, photographer and film-maker. Her work has a unique individual style, a distinct blend of meticulous research, interviews and combinations of image and text. Calle's artistic approach is not characterised by the pursuit of objectivity; rather, the artist seeks out a personal angle, with voids and gaps becoming a key element in her work. Her projects are all nested in a close-knit web of references and cross-references in which the boundaries between reality and fiction, between private and public and between past and present are dissolved.

Un certain regard offers an insight into the work of the acclaimed artist Sophie Calle, with the thematic focus of the exhibition centred on the representation of absence. In her work the artist explores the interplay of memory and forgetting, desire and loss, dream and reality. The five work groups presented in *Un certain regard* reflect Calle's creative output primarily over the last fifteen years. They exemplify her artistic approach, which generates a multi-layered mosaic of emotions and suggestions, with the viewers encountering their own reflection in the disclosure of intimate moments.

For *Les Aveugles (The Blind, 1986)*, Sophie Calle interviewed blind people and asked them to describe their image of beauty. The body of work comprises portrait shots, framed quotes and Calle's photographs of landscapes and objects that relate to the situations described. These juxtapositions allow the artist to blend different approaches to the object of desire, which can never be detached from the power of individual imagination. At the same time, Calle draws attention to the inevitable gaps between fact and fiction that blindness produces and the insurmountable divide between the memory of a visual impression and the imagination of the recipient.

The people Sophie Calle focuses on in *La Dernière Image (The Last Image, 2010)* are also without eyesight. The artist journeyed through Istanbul asking people who had gone blind about their final visual memory before losing their sight. Once again, individually framed quotes from the interviews are combined with Calle's photographs. *La Dernière Image* attempts to capture what is in danger of vanishing: a slowly fading image of what had once left a poignant imprint in the mind. Here, too, we find two realities colliding – the visual and the imagined – realities that refer to one another but can never depict one and the same thing. With a touch of nostalgic wistfulness, we must thus acknowledge that what is shown and what is described can never capture what the blind themselves are slowly forgetting – no matter how meticulously they are scrutinised.

Que voyez-vous ? (What Do You See?, 2013) is based on the spectacular theft that took place in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1991, sending a tremor through the art world. Thirteen famous works of art, including *The Concert (1658–60)* by Jan Vermeer and Govaert Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk (1638)*, were stolen by two men dressed as police officers. Twenty-two years after this heist, Calle returned to a subject she had tackled back in 1991 in *The Last Seen*, re-examining the event in her series *Que voyez-vous ?*. The starting point for this was the Gardner Museum's decision that, rather than leaving the walls in its exhibition spaces blank, it would present empty picture frames in place of the stolen artworks. For this series of works, Calle made portraits shot from behind

of museum staff and visitors standing in front of five of these 'placeholders' and asked, "What do you see?" The answers are placed next to the portraits. The empty space itself becomes a productive element of observation via the museum's act of framing, prompting reflection on museum practices as well as on societal strategies of perception.

For *Detachment* (1996), Sophie Calle trawled through Berlin in search of non-places, photographing vacated plinths, empty expanses of grass, square holes in concrete slabs – the aftermath of a process in which the symbols representing the former GDR were removed following the reunification of Germany in 1989. Calle replaces the missing objects with the memories of passers-by whom she interviewed at the sites where she took her photographs. The recordings were transcribed and compiled in a book, which is opened at the relevant page beneath each photo in the series on display in the exhibition. As a silent witness and testimony to a process of political change, the series of pictures does not, however, point to symbols of power that were once present. Rather, it highlights the act of their disappearance as well as the gesture of remembrance tied to the collective memory of Germany.

In *Parce que* (*Because*, 2018), Calle explores her own motives to press the shutter release of a camera in order to produce a photograph. The installations consist of photos covered with dark fabric on which the artist's reasons can be read as quotations revealing just this "parce que", this "because". Here the explanations are invariably personal and are not descriptions per se of the images behind the hangings. In a reverse game of answer and question, the artist anticipates the reason to allow the viewer to discover the photograph in the subsequent voyeuristic act of lifting the curtain. Calle uses this forced sequence proceeding from text to image to challenge the supremacy of the word in favour of the image: instead of an accompanying text explaining the image, it is now the image that generates a context and legitimises the isolated sentences. In the process, the pecking order is not completely upended; rather, we are given an indication of the extent to which what is said and what is seen depend on one another.

The exhibition *Sophie Calle – Un certain regard* was devised by Nadine Wietlisbach in collaboration with Sophie Calle and created in cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Thun as the first of a two-part show. *Sophie Calle – Regard incertain* will be presented at the Kunstmuseum Thun from 07.09.–01.12.2019.

Sophie Calle – Un certain regard was produced by ARTER and kindly supported by Ringier AG, Landis & Gyr Foundation, S. Eustachius-Foundation and Else v. Sick Foundation.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

17 July 2019, 18:30

Special guided tour with Dr Gesa Schneider, director of Literaturhaus Zürich, and Nadine Wietlisbach, on the combination of text and image and the spaces in between.

24 August 2019, 16:00

Special guided tour with author and storyteller Michael Fehr and Nadine Wietlisbach, on seeing and not seeing, on memories and sensory perception.