



Press release

PLAYSTATION @ Galerie Fons Welters

8 September – 27 October 2012

Opening: Saturday 8 September, 5 – 7 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 1 – 6 pm

Femmy Otten

If you were coming in the fall

The title of Femmy Otten's exhibition in Playstation 'If you were coming in the fall', taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson, points towards an unsettling patience and the aesthetics of waiting. In wall based constellations, solitary and sometimes estranged figures come together. In soft oil colours, she paints a strand man with a moustache wearing an oriental hat and carrying two naked curling women or nymphs on his shoulders. He doesn't seem to be aware of their existence. Is he waiting for an arrival, a return, a desired sign?

Otten's figures are often characterized by a symbolism, a mystery that lies beyond our contemporary recognition, yet is somehow familiar to all. We are left to wonder who these two naked women are and where they have come from. Cutting out portions of time, Otten's works carry an almost mystical transparency. Perhaps the mystery lies not above all in her (often) archaic references, rather in the facial expressions of these figures, that each time seem to peek into the furthest distance. Also in her studio, where the artist is surrounded by faces from the past, different temporalities and visualities melt into distances that are neither far nor close: nineteenth century photographic portraits, found on a market somewhere in Mumbai; simple geometric drawings from when she was only just a child; perfectly symmetrical carved out faces of ancient Egyptian princesses; the naive silhouettes of Bill Traylor's drawings; a book with the intense glances of Piero della Francesca's figures.

This scenography of waiting taking place within the walls of the artist's studio, is transferred to the gallery space. The stillness of the figures convey the endlessly working through of the material. An un-stretched canvas is prepared with plaster primer, sandpapered and primed again and again; before even being touched by the first brush stroke; a wooden bust is carved patiently until the exact right round forms appear. Portraits of the past shape up as the artist somehow hoped and imagined them, as if they were visions from a parallel reality. While awaiting the fall, they 'brush the summer by, with half a smile and half a spurn'.¹

[Laurie Cluitmans]

¹ Emily Dickinson, 'If you were coming in the fall', 1924