

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

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Press release

Galerie Fons Welters

18 January – 1 March 2014

Opening: Saturday 18 January: 5-7pm

Opening times: Tue-Sat: 1-6pm

Timmy van Zoelen

Astroturfer

At first sight the various works that Timmy van Zoelen (1982) brings together in his exhibition *Astroturfer* might appear unconnected, however, Van Zoelen reveals unexpected interfaces between them; they meet in the fluid space between the body and technology.

Van Zoelen is fascinated by the political and aesthetic affect of *lens flare*, the scattering of bright light that shines in a lens and therefore manifests itself visually. "*Can we still consider lens flare which nowadays appears as (special) effects in many Hollywood films and commercials, to be a natural phenomenon when it is deployed as a manipulative tool?*" For his video work *Furious Suns* (2011-2013), he focused on Pier Paolo Pasolini's last film *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975), after the book *Les Cent Vingt - journées the Sodome (The 120 Days of Sodom)* by Marquis de Sade from 1785. In a manner as intensive as inappropriate, he placed suns in every scene of the film - in which a group of boys and girls in a villa in the fascist Salò from around 1944 is subjected to sadistic abuse of power - to penetrate the enclosed areas. In *Furious Suns* Van Zoelen ultimately completely obliterated the image of Pasolini's film; bodies seem to have been replaced by a spectrum of abstract light while the audio indicates the gruesome intensity of the language. The shallowness of the *lens flares* themselves remains, often turning in an endless black void. Does Van Zoelen's explicit exploitation of this technique dazzle us, does it hypnotize or perhaps open our eyes?

I Am the New Surface (2014), a second video in the exhibition, consists of a slide show of photos and videos from the police investigation into Aaron Swartz, an American internet activist who advocated free access to articles on the internet. After Swartz had downloaded millions of articles from the scientific website JSTOR via the MIT network, he was denounced as criminal by the U.S. government. On January 11, 2013 he committed suicide. The images from his apartment and the basement of MIT, where he connected his laptop to the network, only show the detachment of serial numbers, cables and computers. What really matters, both the tragic and political content, remains elusive. Using anthropomorphic software - with preset expressions as "sadness", "exhaustion" and "nervousness" - Van Zoelen gives the media in this stream of images a face and lets them, inaudibly, speak.

An abject constellation of distorted acrylate pieces, engraved cans of Sprite and earth-pigmented wax casts of the hands and feet of the artist, functions as a physical counterpart. After all it is the exhibition's title *Astroturfer* which embodies the recurrent tension between the palpable and virtual in Van Zoelen's work. *Astroturfing* describes a fake staging of a so-called grassroots movement; deliberately regulated and financed from above, by the government or businesses, as apparent activism instead of originated from the ground, amongst the people. While derived from the name for synthetic turf, Van Zoelen sees this term, in her dual nature, as a poetic metaphor, which comprises both the universe and the earth.

[RJS]

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