



Bridget Baker
The Blue Collar Girl (Valais,
Switzerland) 2006-7
lambda print and diasec
60 X 241.5 cm



Bridget Baker
La fille transparente † Kippel/Das
transparente Mädchen in Kippel
2006
lambda print and diasec
180cm x 226.5cm



Bridget Baker
The Pilot 2007
13 minute DVD
original footage: b/w 16mm film
Director of Photography: Michael
Cleary



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Bridget Baker at João Ferreira

by Bettina Malcomess

'Bridget Baeker' sees the artist, the eternal doppelganger, add one more double to her repertoire. What I find most fascinating about this work is its explicit relationship to time. Initial reactions of confusion demonstrate certain expectations of immediate comprehension from an audience which doesn't return after opening night. The exhibition and the film literally need to be given a bit more time. *The Pilot* sees Baker make an exciting shift to what she calls 'moving photography', and extending her filmic photographic work via narrative time. Shot on 16 mm film the artist presents us with 13 minutes of what is constructed to look like found footage from the 1920s.

Based on scenes from the über-dramatic Swiss alpine movies of Arnold Fanck, the film features a Germanic heroine, styled after adventurer, actress and photographer, Leni Riefenstahl. The 'Pilot' thus might be seen as precursor to the 'Maiden' and the 'Blue Collar Girl'. Like them, she attempts to escape from predetermined feminine roles; unlike them, she is running from a particular history, situated in Germany and the Swiss Alps before World War II. It is through Baker's detailed reconstruction of this past, both in the film and in the photographs that complement it, that we see in her work a new, perhaps anthropological, curiosity about the past.

The film presents the 'pilot' to us unconscious in the snow. Slowly, shot by shot, small details like leather uniform, goggles, snow shoes, all specially made for the shoot, reveal to us the period, her occupation, and that her leg is broken, splinted ingeniously with an ice-pick. The screen flickers, occasionally darkening and lightening, lending the re-construction an eerie authenticity. None of these effects were done in post-production but were achieved using netting and vaseline over the lens, while the camera was intentionally sped up and slowed down to emulate the shake associated with early hand cranked cameras. Baker's attention to reconstructing an authentic past here is astonishing, perhaps easily interpreted as too perfect.

Completely silent, the film initially narrates the pilot's alpine predicament with subtle gestures - breathing, a pained expression. It traces the outline of her body against surfaces of ice, rock and snow, keeping the shots between medium and close-up. The intimacy of the shots, their stillness and duration, set up what for me is a very erotic relationship between camera and subject. When she is finally rescued, the film shifts, both in register and location. It is in the harsher tones of documentary that we see a now limp body pulled up against the side of a glacial art-deco building, originally a movie theatre called the 'Colisseum' in Cape Town. While this is a sequence of impressive scale, the shift from erotic subject to limp object is somewhat disturbing. Two shots from the snow sequence frame Baker's intentions here: one is of a hand holding a compass, the other a watch. It is in these kind of shots, often superfluous to the narrative - something Hitchcock was famous for - where the author of the film reveals that you are in the time and space of their fiction. It is such elements, as well as her attention to authenticity, that inscribe the work within Baker's own oeuvre, itself constituted as a past referenced within this current work, that complicate the work's relationship to both its filmic and artistic precedents.

In the adjacent tryptich, we both see and don't see the 'Blue Collar Girl'. Initially seated in an Art Deco cinema, reading a German film magazine, in the next panel she disappears in the snow and ice of a glacier. On the cinema screen is what appears to be a shot of her signature image, the original 'Blue Collar Girl'. Closer inspection reveals that this is a shot of the 'Blue Collar Girl' photograph as she has been placed on the wall of the costume museum in Kippel in the accompanying large scale diasec print entitled *La fille transparente † Kippel/Das transparente Mädchen in Kippel*. Here the artist inserts her character, the 'Transparent girl', as well as her double, into the reconstruction of a typical Swiss village house. Baker also had the museum place there a traditional mask, worn by the men of a Swiss village during a yearly ritual to frighten young, eligible maidens. This framing intentionally gives visibility to a family crest on the other wall. Importantly it is against these symbols of masculine power that the 'Transparent Girl' performs her feminine labour, inscribing, into a wooden leg, Baker's trademark phrase: 'Only You Can ©'.

The mixture of minute anthropological detail and Baker's own iconography continues in the film. The pilot's snow boots are inscribed, in reverse, with Baker's copyrighted

phrase. In the rescue sequence, objects called *tasseln* hang from the pilot as she ascends, a reference to wooden objects traditionally used for identification and exchange in the Swiss alps. Baker mixes history and fiction in the reappearance of the 'Blue Collar Girl' who appears in a 20s style movie poster: *Goldi Tanzt*. This was name of the last woman to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft in Switzerland in the 1700s, weaving an amazingly rich set of historical references with those of the more recent past of popular culture.

Baker's doubles, superheroes and doppelgangers are all women trying to escape their time and place, against the mythologies and symbols of masculinity, as background. What interests me in this new work, and perhaps what is most subversive about it, is that Baker now turns an anthropological gaze on European tradition, from a point of view located in the supposedly non-Western, postcolonial context of South Africa. In the film and in the photographs Baker takes agency by inscribing her own mythologies onto past times and places, while playing out the limits and successes of her escape. Despite the Alps being in her way, time is definitely on BB's side.

Opens: October 3
Closes: October 27

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 SUBMIT REVIEW

LISTINGS	REVIEWS	NEWS	ARTBIO	WEBSITES	PROJECT	EXCHANGE	FEEDBACK	DIARY
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