

## Annika von Hausswolff

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A decade ago Daniel Birnbaum introduced Annika von Hausswolff's photographs in the pages of this magazine, writing about the symbiosis they present between scopophilia and sadistic violence. Simple in conception, von Hausswolff's early work was bare-bones, iconic, and an artistic success. As her work gained momentum it became more intricate, flirting with the inscrutable, but ultimately delivering the image of desire divided by loss. By the time of her 2005 show at Sweden's Baltic Art Center, "The Construction of a Breakdown," she was immersed in a flagrant affair with phenomenology; banal objects became capable of inducing concentrated, evocative memories. Her most recent exhibition, "The Heat from Our Bodies Generates

the Images that Mortality Demands," seems to mark a pause in her work's forward movement, closing the circle on existing associations of memory.

*The Memory of My Mother's Underwear Transformed into a Flameproof Drape*, 2003, is a silly-sounding but hard-won title for what is surely von Hausswolff's masterpiece. Stylistically it registers as "domestic sculpture" (to quote the title of a 2002 photograph), although a pediatric psychiatrist would recognize it as a "transitional object"—a color-induced memory made tangible. This theme (also in evidence in *A Given Moment in the History of Coming into Being*, 2002, and *Sad Memories of Pink*, 2002) is given yet another encore in this exhibition. Three nearly identical works, each titled *Esoteric Forensic*, 2006, put on show three curtains—in shades running from beige to rose—hanging inside unfinished boxy frames. Presented behind glass, the drapes lie just beyond reach, like a memory of something (or someone) we cannot grasp. How this skin-tone palette evokes Mother evidently remains enigmatic even to the artist herself, which is apparently reason enough to excavate the experience all over again. Her self-indulgence ranks in productive intensity with Louise Bourgeois's insatiable pandering to childhood fears or Bruce Nauman's looping returns to unresolved wordplay.

Von Hausswolff continues to revisit earlier themes: *Untitled*, 2006, recalls the droll struggle to manage an unmanageable balloon in the series "Attempting to Deal with Time and Space," 1997, and has the pseudo-documentary look of the series "Back to Nature," 1992–93. This black-and-white photograph details eight phased hand movements for manipulating a balloon without hinting at why. Is the balloon a metaphor for the artist's memories? The hands struggle to shape the balloon; and yet, if it is impossible to control the intangible, it is equally impossible to forsake it. Another untitled photograph from 2006 presents a variation on a different signature image of von Hausswolff's: a woman in her underwear seen from behind in equivocal circumstances, as in *Study for Sculpture Leaving the World Behind*, 1999. But whereas earlier models posed at thresholds that invited escape (a door or window) or were blockaded by the pinkish drape (Mother's ineluctable presence) here von Hausswolff gives us Everywoman, garbage bags in hand, confronting the timeless void in the midst of life's dreary routines. Perhaps the finale for this soliloquy is at hand?

Von Hausswolff has always been an artist of great inward concentration, committed to retracing philosophical riddles and revising provisional answers. She is at her best in this exhibition, and in harmony with Baudelaire, who once wrote, "In philosophical studies we see that the human mind, imitating the course of stars, follows a curve that inevitably leads it back to its point of departure. To conclude is to close a circle."

—Ronald Jones

View of Annika von Hausswolff, "The Heat from Our Bodies Generates the Images that Mortality Demands," 2006. Left: *Esoteric Forensic*, 2006, mixed media, 71 x 35 5/8 x 11 1/8". Right: *Esoteric Forensic*, 2006, mixed media, 70 1/4 x 35 3/8 x 11 1/8".

