

Always on Display, 2022

Always on Display (8:34 minutes) is a video that can be presented alone or in installation combined with slogan T-shirts and a dance performance. The work revolves around material from the Planas Archive - a repository of postcard motifs of Mallorca, beauty pageants and photo shoots, which were extensively photographed and filmed by Josep Planas. It is a tourist and media testimony of the island between 1950-1970, as well as a platform for creative exchange between artists today. The scenes in *Always on Display* originate from Silke Schwarz's artistic research in the Planas Archive, as well as from videos the artist captured during her residency on the island, and from found footage from social media. The video material features the omnipresent palms of Palma, performers and sunsets. In the work, curtains open, scantily clad women twirl like palm trees down the catwalk, lounge on boats or car hoods and pose for their audience. The work is complemented by pop songs from the 1980s to the present day and an artificial voice-over.

The medium of photography, as well as moving image, creates and documents visibility. An archive of photos and moving images is a focal point for these visibilities. It is also a site of decision-making. What has been documented and what has not? A hierarchy of interpretation arises over a wide spectrum of events. At the same time, an archive is a place of invisibility and forgetting. Events that were not recorded cannot be found in the archive. They nonetheless happened and have had an impact. *Always on Display* engages with the staging and representation of the non-male body. The work raises questions: Which socio-cultural viewing habits are served and which are not? What kind of imagery do we encounter? Silke Schwarz extracts these poses. Then as now, the poses are given a staging of appearance and reality. Schwarz sensitizes the viewer to the stage. Using archival material, her own filmed material and found footage, the artist illuminates the function of stages, making them present virtually and physically. Movements are repeated and zoomed in on, scenes pause or shake. Poses overlap and are meticulously arranged in a grid.

The scenes reveal the artist's intense process of immersion into the archival footage. The video shows moments when the female body is displayed, stereotyped and becomes a projection surface for our gaze. Schwarz painstakingly dissects the material until it becomes interwoven on the screen. Social media is chosen as the virtual stage. With stroboscopic effects and beats, *Always on Display* fragments our perception, which has been conditioned over decades, and challenges us to reorder and reevaluate it. Schwarz introduces platforms of invisibility and acrobatically juggles our associations. Pop songs open up another layer. Music is specifically composed for the scenes, creating haunting imagery. This trademark of Schwarz's is also reflected in previous works, wherein legal texts or political speeches are transformed into sound pieces. She often works with songs that shaped her as a person. Her installations focus on the female body and its projections.

Always on Display also makes reference to Madonna's hit song *Vogue* and to voguing culture. Voguing is a dance style that was originally practiced and shaped by the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian-Gay-Bi-Trans-Queer-Plus) community. Through fancy dress and competitions, held in so-called ballrooms, the voguing scene became a way of life in a non-heteronormative culture, which is now being appropriated by commercial pop culture. Britney Spears' song *Gimme More* catapults us back to the turn of the millennium when Facebook (2004) and Instagram (2010) were launched. Other pop songs animate the audience to move. Another layer opens up through the artificial voice-over. Touristy dream worlds are presented ad absurdum; our desires of self-optimization and happiness are playfully and humorously inscribed in the text as well the images. The audience is addressed directly: an artificial voice repeats the phrase „Be real, just be yourself, enjoy“ in a continuous loop. Vogue, pop, palm trees, and bodies are arranged in the newly staged ballroom to which the artist invites us. A place for dance and glitter. A place of carefree being. A shelter that allows for visibility and invisibility. Put on the shirt and never forget, you're always on display.