

The Drowning Room

AUSGETRAUMT curated by Kathrin Rhomberg, Secession, Vienna

By Friedrich Tietjen

The recognition that civilization, so laboriously formulated over the course of centuries, is no more than a thin layer that is only tenuously sustainable, is evident in so many examples from history that scepticism is appropriate, when discussions of values are as insistently called for as conducted - all the more as they usually cloak a slide into barbarism.

Using simple means, Patrick Jolley and Reynold Reynolds dive under this surface into the depths, where its brilliance only reaches as a flitting reflection. For *The Drowning Room*, a container was placed under water and furnished in a timeless bourgeois style, in order to serve as a setting for dramas both substantial and trivial: two men fighting, a couple lying in bed, a woman preparing a meal. The actors' struggle is patently evident - the fury of the two combatants is exhausted in harmless blows, with lips pressed tightly together to avoid breathing, the kiss becomes a grotesque grimace, the woman's glasses floating above her nose, cutting off the head of a fish requires unexpected dexterity. All of this looks unquestionably comical - all the more so, as the dull, slow characters do not serve an art audience as figures for identification. But the water is quite unmistakably there as the drowning, oppressive and yet unnoticeable normality that pervades even the last corner of every present. Its heaviness weighs on every movement, dulls every sound; only in certain shots is there a clock severely ticking off always the same fragments from a time that is no longer a stream, but a pond slowly growing muddied. Living in *The Drowning Room* is as impossible as escaping from it; the only ones that are dead are the pet cat and the fish on the plate. The substitute actions of an impotence conscious of itself lead to physical violence and closeness and fail because of the tenacious resistance of the congealed atmosphere: neither can the embrace offer shelter nor can the opponent be conquered - every endeavour remains without lasting results.

Strangely familiar, strangely uncanny, the film thus resembles those nightmares, whose ominousness is not lessened by being recognized by the dreamer as a dream.

Recurring night after night, without one becoming conscious of them in the morning, they can become part of a reality, whose deep structure they depict as a negative

utopia. Wanting to free oneself from this would mean emerging, breaking through the smooth surface from below and making the still water flow.

Friedrich Tietjen, 2002

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