

# SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

## JENNA WESTRA - *She's Reading 1*

**September 6 - October 12, 2019**

SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY is pleased to present *She's Reading 1*, the first solo exhibition of New York based artist Jenna Westra at the gallery.

Only photography can hold the image. Jenna Westra uses the camera to record what would otherwise be lost in movement. Westra's work is built on the core characteristics of the medium: a technical translation of eyesight, with light, shadow, crop, composition, perspective and hue as its defining factors. A split of a second, turned into images to hang onto.

Westra's photographs oscillate between careful construction and results of chance. She invites – mostly female – models to perform within the set of a photograph. That performative aspect of her images creates a lightness, as the photographs don't impose themselves as definitive, but as negotiable views of a certain moment. This notion is reinforced when Westra presents her work in series, with images that are versions of a motif, differently cropped or chronologically arranged. The photographer is analyzing/ reading the scene (*She's Reading*) and the viewer is *reading* the resulting images.

*Legs and Chair (Armature)*: a pair of legs resting on a foldable wooden chair. It seems simple, almost logical, as the scene approximates a person sitting on a chair, but none of the known ends meet. Everything is oriented differently, chair and performer are lying on the floor, the chair meets the legs with its bottom side and comes close to the shape of the human extremities resting on its top. Similarly to this work, *Armrest* presents a closely cropped scene of an arm holding another as if it were solely made for that purpose. An arm, a shelf, an armshelf: another representation of the anthropomorphic objecthood that exists in Westra's works.

In the works *Nipple Tableau* and *Body Blocks 7* overlapping body parts form graphic arrangements. The gaze is jumping back and forth between what we know is front, back, or a specific part of the body, trying to define what belongs where. We know it is a human body part we are looking at. It might even be a female nude – an icon of the longtime male dominated medium of photography with women exposed in front of the camera – but with these works our attention might be shifted toward the composition and the mood of the image more than the nudity itself. It's almost as if bodies and objects become interchangeable

actors of form, all known, yet unknown as they are shown in Westra's work. The typical power dynamic between the person behind the camera and the one photographed is undermined here, by positioning the camera at unexpected immersive angles, by presenting a female gaze on female action, by incorporating the model's clothing choice in the work.

A veil of film grain lies on top of Westra's works, as she works with analog photography. This contributes to the soft mood emanating from many of her pictures, for example *Lemon Reach*: A group of bodies, composed around a glass table with lemons, reflecting the environment in front of a classical stone balustrade. Sunlight spreads over the scene. A hand rests on a thigh in a suggestive pose. An image, a summer haze: place, participants and time are left to the viewer's speculation.

In *Women with Sheet*, the sheet, possibly once an object of duty that needed to be washed, cleaned and ironed is about to fly off in the wind in front of three female figures. A procession of freedom? A clean sheet to start over?

Fabric and skin are both protagonists in Westra's work. One is (un)covering the other. As in the diptych *Silk Pull 1-2*, displaying a body behind cloth with the model holding the cover, unveiling only the legs and hand.

*Cherry Seat* and *Cherries 1-3*, are successive to each other, jumping from a black and white composition with a seated woman, a cherry and a hand reaching in a water glass to a series of three images in color with details of the hand, the water glass and the cherry in a slightly different crop. In all of these works, is it women reaching for the fruits that are their own?

The pictures hint at a narrative that links bodies to objects to spaces and interlinks genres and times, from dance to performance to photography, from the analog to the digital, from seventies references to a contemporary view on the female, on the body, on its wear.

Text: Johanna Jaeger

The opening reception is on Thursday, 5 September 2019, from 6 to 8 pm.

For further information and images, please contact the gallery anytime:

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