

Charlotte Moth

The story of a different thought

'Three ways to tell a story', the voice off-camera says, and it quickly becomes clear that there could be many more ways than just the three main strands recounted in the new video by Charlotte Moth. 'The story of a different thought' is a collage of photographic, film, archival and scientific materials that combines documentary and poetic thought images with formal principles of flowing and floating. Like the exhibition for the Skulpturenmuseum Marl, the video centring round the Marl Town Hall is the result of extensive research, for which the artist was invited to the three venues of the co-operative undertaking: Cologne (Temporary Gallery), Middelburg/NL (Kunsthalle De Vleeshal) and Marl. The film was made within the scope of the production grant by Kunstproduzenten, of Cologne, who granted their first scholarship to, and exhibited works by, young international artists in the field of electronic and digital media.

Charlotte Moth begins her film with clichéd images, impressions of wild geese on the idyllic lake in the centre of Marl that unleash memories of places and situations quite contrary to the real impression experienced by visitors to the 'new centre of Marl'. In the geographical centre of Marl, a city created only in 1936 through a bundling of surrounding villages and that, through coal mining and a chemical park, developed into a major industrial centre on the northern edge of the Ruhr region, in the 1950s an urban utopia was planned, large portions of which were realised in the following decades.

In the competition held in 1957 for the redesign of the Marl city centre, the Rotterdam architects' office of Van den Broek and Bakema prevailed over well-known competitors including Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobsen, Hans Scharoun and Rudolf Schwarz with a radical design that is appealing to this day for its functional division and separation of the political from the administrative areas. At the same time, in its choice of materials, the design is also a testimony to a utopian faith that seems foreign to us today. The architects proposed an experimental and risky project integrating the latest technologies and materials while in many ways reflecting the city's economic upturn: The design inserted a complex of buildings beneath a bridge-like, folding-roof structure built of reinforced concrete and mounted on oil, along with two (of four planned) office towers, their floors suspended with concrete elements from an inner core. Early on, however, this construction began to show severe structural damage; after just 20 years it had to be fundamentally refurbished and reinforced. At the time, the aim of using an architectural competition to produce a city hall that would serve as a 'city crown' for a new type of modernity was hailed as progressive and exemplary. In its real form, however, it remains controversial to this day, at least among the people of Marl.

'The story of a different thought' describes a process that is very aptly characterised as 'trading hopes for memories,' a situation in which the expectations of a hopeful future are

replaced by memories of those hopes. Up through the 1960s, Marl one of the wealthiest communities in the West German economic miracle; today, though, it is a 'shrinking city', a status not helped by an awareness of having been 'a city of tomorrow yesterday' ['gestern eine Stadt von morgen'], as pointed out by the title of an exhibition currently under way in Bochum, Marl and Mülheim. The film by this British artist currently living in Paris takes a different direction: Taking as her point of departure the perhaps still functional yet no longer understood placement of the entire building on a bed of hydraulic oil, she addresses the phenomenon of floating, weightless as ice cubes in water. The glass with the brown liquid and ice cubes does not contain cola; actually, this detail from her film shows warm water in which ice cubes softly crackle as they melt.

The principle of floating determines the entire film; time and again, there are flowing, hovering dolly shots across the marble-clad halls in the town hall; in close-ups, the marble looks like veined ice. The unsteady ground on which a building slowly drifts and shifts its position is also the connection to 'Twin Beaches House', a holiday home built in 2013 on sand dunes on the shore of Lake Manitoba by Canadian architect Rebecca Loewen. About the structural parallels between the town hall in Marl and the cottage in Canada, the off-camera narration observes: 'The question of flow is a question of appearance and sensation. Because flow can mean both physical displacement and standstill – suspension under tension (pulling apart) or enduring under pressure (squeezing together); in engineering and physics, these are expressions of relations of opposing forces. That is what is fascinating about flow.'

'The story of a different thought' also comprises an entire series of strong visual associations; working from the sculpture 'Habakuk' by Max Ernst from the Skulpturenmuseum collection, 'Project Habbakuk', by Geoffrey Pyke, is woven into the film. Under the misspelled name of the prophet, the aim in 1942 was to create a completely utopian fantasy project that would protect Allied shipping in the mid-Atlantic. Icebergs more than a kilometre in length would serve as floating aircraft carriers capable of withstanding torpedo and bomb attacks; the plans were shelved in 1943. Consequently, Charlotte Moth then addresses another important representative of this name, the 'Habakkuk' (Lo Zuccone, with two 'k's in the British spelling) by Donatello, who created a marble sculpture for the Campanile of the Florence Cathedral around the year 1424.

After recognising Günter Fruhtrunk, who painted the entire 'insel' café in the 'Marler Stern' shopping centre in 1976/1977, the film returns to the Marl Town Hall. Again, the camera floats through the large council chamber – the Town Hall complex is the central hub of Moth's film, which in its final sequence concludes with a dramatically lit view from the tower out into the shrouded distance of the Ruhr region, underlaid by a poem: 'The Lamp of Truth', by Texas author and poet Joshua Edwards (2014):

Setting sun, moon rising
to light the two buildings
as structures might be lit:

columns bright against
a winter sky. Grey smoke
climbs in harmonic braids

from the stovepipes of
lesser buildings. A figure
present in the landscape

confirms by its presence
that knowledge begins
when belief finds form.

Another form of belief
ends in another place,
abstracted, somewhere

in the horizon`s empty
space, as a faint shape,
some painted frame

or else a static square
of vapor. The winter sky
like a pane of grey glass:

those buildings there,
secured against shadows
as suns rise, moons set

Georg Elben

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The story of a different thought, 2014

16mm Farbfilm, digitalisiert und auf 35 mm übertragen, 28.55 min

Charlotte Moth ist 1978 in Carshalton/UK geboren und lebt in Paris. Zurzeit promoviert sie am Royal College of Art und unterrichtet am Goldsmiths College, London. Moth studierte u.a. an der Slade School of Art, London (M.F.A.) und war Postgraduierte der Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht. Stipendien (Auswahl): 2013 Les Ateliers des Arques/F; 2012 Fieldwork Marfa/USA; Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart; 2011 Fondation Serralves, Porto; 2007 Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Ausstellungen (Auswahl): 2014 MAC/VAL Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne; 2013 European Kunsthalle/Kunsthhaus Bregenz; Triennale Fellbach; GAK, Bremen; 2012 Centre d'art contemporain, Genf; 2011 Musée Départemental d'Art Contemporain, Rochechouart; Kunsthalle Basel; 2010 Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg; 2009 FormContent, London; 2008 Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; 2007 Project, Dublin.