

Flying away without treading on your feathers

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Wanting to fly away while standing on your own feathers: this one line roughly sums up Neil Young's song *Expecting to Fly*, and serves as Michaela Grill's motto for the installation *My Restless Heart*. Young's song is a profound reference to the sixties and the mood of upheaval at the time, marked as much by energy as by melancholy. Yet nearly 50 years later the impulses of this upheaval—once ranging widely from the medial to the social—can still be felt in individual artistic endeavours, even when these do not explicitly refer back to the sixties. This is the case, for example, with Michaela Grill. Her media and style repertoire is firmly embedded in the electronic culture of the present, but her spectrum in terms of concept and above all atmosphere reaches far back into the past. This can be seen in *My Restless Heart*: a space of yearning—or rather wanderlust—in which six projections play their individual scenarios layered with many kinds of historical sediment.

Journey through the Past—once again a song by Neil Young, this time from the early 1970s—likewise serves as a key phrase for the exhibition. 'Will your restless heart / come back to mine / on a journey thru the past' says the song, and Grill transforms these lines into a first-person narrative, using the 'you' addressed in the song as 'my restless heart'. This reverse projection subsequently forms the dispositive within which the wanderlust-space takes on its shape. This form-finding does not occur by means of a clearly contoured projection space, but rather—adapted to the cramped slope of the projection room—by means of several overlapping fields of vision. Thus the six single projections—four on the walls and two on the ceiling—are arranged so that their edges blur into one another, the transitions almost invisible. The chipboard brown of the walls stains the whole pictorial spectrum like a continuous sepia tone, so that the seams barely show. What's more, the viewers—purely due to the cramped, compact conditions of the cell-like room—constantly find themselves partly in the back-light of one or several of the projectors. As a result one is continually 'illuminated', in a shadowy way becoming part of the projection itself. At the same time, one's own perspective constantly passes through a kind of back-light refraction.

In this way the 'restless mind' can be found located at the intersection of several projection cones simultaneously, immersed in the multiple projections within the room with short sequences taken mainly from nature or outside spaces—thus also opening up imaginary spaces of resonance for one's own projections of yearning and wanderlust. Will the restless heart find calm there? Or is it reflected back onto itself after all? This set is linked to—or rather 'modulated' by—a self-transforming continuum, (pictorial) streams and (subjective) counter-streams

or counterathemes, by means of the rising and ebbing ambient sound. Andreas Berger has created sound surfaces that in some places contract into a subtle background noise, in other passages then mounting into compact, spherical architectures. Grill's stimulus to find an electronic counterpart to the voice of the young Neil Young has been translated by Berger into a simple-seeming yet multi-layered, constructed complex of high frequency. His liquid texture, indeed his ceaseless deliquescence, prove at an acoustic level that an actual arrival appears to be out of the question here.

Here Grill stretches a pictorial arc, dome-like, as in early Expanded Cinema installations. This is accordingly marked by the interplay between the desire to escape and the state of imprisonment. For example, extreme close-ups show a pelican incessantly flapping its wings yet never moving from the spot. This vignette of immobility suffused with yearning is mixed with images of vast ice floes in the Arctic, flocks of birds moving randomly and feather-light over them. On the opposite wall, once again a combination of landscapes with birds and the desire for distant places: flamingos, proud and elegant symbols of the American southwest, strangely coloured and apparently even more fragile than usual. They stalk through their fenced-in biotope, while a road in California's Death Valley, juddering eerily, points towards a distant vanishing point. And another time, on one of the end walls: crows sit waiting on bizarrely shaped branches—darkly pulsating veins in this kind of image distillation—then set off flying through the light of the sunset, to plunge into a terrible darkness. Opposite them, meanwhile, a celestial body rises: the moon—no, Mars, following its glowing red path over a projection field interfused with graininess—as if it were close enough to touch, this planet that is probably the object of the most intense extraterrestrial longings at this time. There is a firmament made up of stars that are themselves restless, apparently trembling. It completes the setting of a projection space that intertwines in many different ways, in which both infinite expanse and extreme constriction are embedded in equal measure.

'I tried so hard to stand / as I stumbled / and fell to the ground': another line from Neil Young's *Expecting to Fly*. The installation *My Restless Heart* takes up this aspect of stumbling, of jolting: in the six forms shown, it inscribes unalterably onto the fantasies of freedom their limits and barriers. At the same time, however, any potential falling-over or becoming entangled is congenially prevented, by having—alongside each image of wanderlust or behind the backs of the viewers—another image always in waiting; one that absorbs the shortcomings of the other, even though it might ultimately prove untenable. And thus the restless mind sees itself profoundly reflected in its desire to escape—visually, but also acoustically, or in the combination of the two. Without anyone, least of all himself, treading on its feathers in the process.

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