

Jana Coorevits

05.12.2021-22.01.2022

all day I've built a lifetime
and now the sun sinks
to undo it

American poet Anne Sexton had her breakthrough in the 1960s with highly “confessional poetry”, coming from and dealing with her struggles with mental health, womanhood and personal relationships. The universal nevertheless resounds in the individual. This is also the case in “The Fury of Sunsets” (1974), from which lines were taken for this exhibition’s title. In this poem, Sexton contemplates the meaning of daily, deeply human attempts to make something of life in light of the immense, and finite, which the setting sun symbolizes. She questions this in the landscape, she questions the landscape. In the physical world she sees her inner world reflected.

In a similar way, the two overlap in the work of Jana Coorevits. As a filmmaker and photographer, she directs her lens at where the geographical, physical and mental landscapes converge, touch. The sensitive translation of emotions and experiences into image, word and sound is central to her practice. Thereby she continuously enriches her frame of reference with (narrative techniques from) literature, film, photography and music - the notes she keeps, from Billie Eilish to Rutger Kopland, indicate the scope of this. It also testifies to the connection that Coorevits seeks with other makers, readers, viewers.

Her interdisciplinary approach, technical expertise and above all sharp sensitivity ensure that her pieces can arise in an intuitive way. Form and content evolve together - she rarely uses a predetermined scenario. This carefully guarded openness to let poetic concept and material execution affect or challenge each other is what enhances the sensory experience in her works. Colour and sound, text and texture are fundamental elements in Coorevits’ atmospheric, suggestive (audio) visual essays. The work makes visible, tangible, what precedes words.

In her first solo exhibition at Fred & Ferry Gallery, she shows photographic pieces made between 2015 and 2021. The selection outlines the nuanced visual language that Coorevits has developed over the years. In intimate black-and-white images, she abstracted (feminine) bodies to the point of complete alienation: anyone who looks without prior knowledge doubts - is this landscape or body? They are both stretched out, emotionally charged. Coorevits manages to capture their (un)injured state powerfully yet vulnerably, beautifully yet subtly. In the materiality of the works, for example in “deining”, “vista without footprints” and “figura serpentina”, she deepens their tactility even more. The precisely chosen titles of these images further add a layer of meaning that directs the gaze. This also applies to “migraine” and to the UV-sensitive silk screen print with self-written text, which forms a couple with a long exposure photo of a shooting star by way of the title. “Interval #1” and “Interval #2” attest to Coorevits’ recurring attention to rhythm, to the tension between moving forward and standing still. With her camera, she interprets time.

She also does this in the film projected in the exhibition space. Coorevits focused her camera on a rock formation in Death Valley. During the projection, the recorded image appears only because the sun moves throughout the day - as Anne Sexton well realized. The sunlight colours the panorama in a near painterly way - Coorevits did not change the position or settings of the camera. It leads to an intriguing result: “cumbrous mountains, seemingly immobile, but in which changes occur with impressive slowness”. Coorevits empirically infiltrates, the visitor infiltrates, into the image, into the multi-layered landscape.

For several years now, the extreme landscape of Death Valley has played a vital part in the artistic research conducted by Coorevits, in collaboration with writer and poet Charlotte Van den Broeck. On the one hand, their research project was theoretical- methodological in nature: they looked for a way to allow image and language to exist autonomously in one work, without illustrating each other, but rather resonating with each other. On the other hand, there was the artistic output; Van den Broeck recently published her third collection of poetry "Aarduitwrijvingen", for which Coorevits provided the cover image. In addition to the various images and recordings that Coorevits already made on location, the film "peak" (for which Van den Broeck acts as co-screenwriter) will be an all-encompassing outcome.

In terms of content, their research started from the relation between the landscape, the feminine body and injury. Nature and woman are often metaphorically equated on the basis of their fertility (and in contrast to the culture-linked masculine). But what about the barren, scarred feminine body? Coorevits and Van den Broeck found a suitable association in the equally barren dead valley. The hurt landscape in the hurt body, the hurt body in the hurt landscape. Just like the desert, the injury changes, barely visible, with the passage of time. Just like the landscape was built up in layers over time, the skin consists of superimposed layers. Contours, tissues and wounds can be recognized in both, in all depths.

In an ambiguous way, invading the landscape, staying there for a long time and becoming part of it, also shows parallels with invading the body. The last lines of Anne Sexton's poem can be read as an allusion to that intruder. They seem to say: "Who is responsible for my psyche, my body, my house, my landscape, that I inhabit? To whom does it belong?" These are also questions that profoundly reverberate in Coorevits' work.

why am I here?
why do I live in this house?
who's responsible?
eh?

Eline Verstegen - November 2021

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