

Anita Gratzner Timeless*

* Text by Thomas Macho. First published in: *Human Time Anatomy*. Galerie im Stifterhaus, Linz 1997



He who seeks his vanished twin, she who pursues her estranged mirror image, sooner or later enter an intermediate realm, a mysterious zone, systematically constructed from the longing for origins and the proximity to death. Anita Gratzner's images abduct the observed eye into this zone—into the sphere where beauties hold sway, beauties who remain nothing but "the terrible beginning."¹ The zone is mysterious, though not just because it gathers together preserved corpses and unborn children. Mysterious it is indeed, but not only because it has been situated in sinister places usually off-limits to the public: in the panoptically-arranged rooms of the former Viennese insane asylum, in the cellars of the Berlin Charité, in the halls of the Theatrum anatomicum of Krakow. The zone is also—and above all—mysterious because it lies in the transitional domain between two cultures and two epochs: in the no-man's-land between chamber of wonders and art museum, between alchemist's kitchen and laboratory, between obsessive enthusiasm for exceptions and no-less-obsessive devotion to rules.

Anita Gratzner's images are literally monstrous: they show that which cannot be shown. In doing so, they bear witness to a breach—the breach between the premodern experience of

miraculous signs and modern-day experience of sensations. According to a ubiquitous conviction, we are living in the shadow of a "monster millennium." But it is precisely in the shadow of this very millennium—under the sign of an unprecedented renaissance of horror-aesthetic—that a ban has established itself, one prohibiting the singular deviation as tantamount to an epiphanic manifestation without appearance. Permissible is solely the artificial, the iterative monster—the fabulous creature in duplicate.

Within the horizon of the demand for the technological reproducibility of all living beings, the effect of photographs is practically scandalous—like fetishes of a pornographic passion for unrepeatable uniqueness. What they perceive is not equivalent to the encyclopedic order of a cabinet full of wax figures; what they attempt to capture contradicts the fun to be had with perfect masks and special effects just as thoroughly as it does the consummate ideals of pathological documentation.

These photographs take a stand not only for form, but also for that which is material; not for the pictorial rhetoric of thrills, but rather for the remains of a body that imperceptibly evades all forms of imitation by means of Latex or Silicon Graphics.

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke: Duineser Elegien (The Duino Elegies), in: *Die Gedichte*, Frankfurt, Insel Verlag, 1986