

REVIEW - 18 MAY 2013

# Rineke Dijkstra

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With her show at MMK in Frankfurt, entitled *The Crazy House*, Rineke Dijkstra made subtle links between her own works and those in the museum's collection. Acting as both artist and curator, her photographs and videos were found throughout the building, resonating not only with one another but also entering into a precise and elegant dialogue with works by artists including Isa Genzken, Jeff Wall and Florian Slotawa. Rather than creating obvious juxtapositions, the hang aimed to create new meanings without merely exploiting the other works. Since Dijkstra's own works speak about adolescence and parties, their impact on the works from the collection was sometimes surprising. The only painting borrowed from outside of the collection, Pablo Picasso's *Weeping Woman* (1937), is also the subject of a video work by Dijkstra, *Ruth Drawing Picasso* (2009). In this piece, a girl in school uniform laboriously copies the picture (not seen in the film) at Tate Liverpool. The presence of the Picasso in Dijkstra's exhibition, in the first room, was a sign of curatorial subtlety, as well as announcing the show's main theme: portraiture as the representation of humans within their social context.

The core of the exhibition consists of videos made by the Dutch artist (between 1995 and 2009) in various nightclubs in Liverpool and Zaandam in the Netherlands. They show young people, selected from nightclubs and isolated from their surroundings, dancing against a white wall in the artist's studio. Clubbing can be a strange experience, between the crush of the crowd and total isolation. Dijkstra's concept separates the dancers from other people, and as the young subjects are being observed by the camera they sometimes look at us, the viewers of the video, right in the eye. What Dijkstra is interested in is not the dancing itself but the possibility of using time and depth to create portraits in the classical sense. The half-length format crops out the legs, proving that the emphasis is not on athletic display. Taking an emphatic look at young people, Dijkstra does not put them in embarrassing situations (of the kind created on television programmes like *Pop Idol*). Instead of acting out a contrived role they seem to be having fun. This shapes the mood of the works, making the dancers' enjoyment infectious.

One indication that all this has little to do with clubbing was the almost total absence of reference to gay club culture in the show (the exceptions were a work by Elaine Sturtevant recalling Félix González-Torres, and a drawing by Andy Warhol). Dijkstra is more interested in youth and the changes it brings. This is the reason for the central place accorded in the show to the photographs from the series *Almerisa* (1994–ongoing). They show an earnest-looking little girl, who becomes a rebellious youth, then an adult, and finally a mother: portraits taken at irregular intervals that document a changing life and the passing of time. The room where this series hung also contained a partition wall with two *Date Paintings* by On Kawara's ongoing series, started in 1966. Here, the conceptual painter obsessed by time and the photographer who traces life in a person's face are linked even more by Reiner Ruthenbeck's installation testifying to the instability of all connections (*Umgekippte Möbel*, Upturned Furniture, 1971).

As a whole, *The Crazy House* was an experience as simple as it was strange. Ceal Floyer's projection *Double Act* (2006) shows a red curtain and a circular beam of light pointed at it. Against this background, one suddenly saw Dijkstra's portraits as if they showed characters taking to the stage – as if a play or performance was just beginning. In the same way, on entering the room with Dan Flavin's great work *Two primary series and one secondary* (1968), one asked oneself if Flavin's neon tubes were not actually the light show for a stylish disco. This gave the minimalist light piece a new association – iconoclastic and full of love.

*Translated by Nicholas Grindell*