

reflection
for
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Sibyl Heijnen

13 May - 26 November 2017
Palazzo Bembo *Personal Structures*
Venice art Biennale

Open daily from 10:00 to 18:00, except Tuesdays
Riva del Carbon # 4793, 30124 Venezia, Italy

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Sibyl Heijnen conquers the room. That would be the pithiest description of her working method. Here, at the Palazzo Bembo, she is occupying not only a wall, but also the narrow space located just in front of it. After all, the concept of space does not revolve around a two-dimensional plane, but is all about the void opening up between floor, walls and ceiling. The installations which she has set up at various locations around the globe have often manifested how she is capable of enhancing the tactile experience of a building, making visitors undergo light and reflections on the surface of soft materials. And yet the wall, too, is of fundamental importance. Heijnen takes up the torch where the architect stops. The presence of a stone wall, of rooms with fixed dimensions, of daylight and of colour, determines what she would want to add, could add to it. Especially when one considers the unusual materials and the apparently intuitively created shapes and drawings, this appears to be pre-eminently an achievement of modern art.

In fact, however, she positions herself within a tradition that encompasses all cultures and all times. Since earliest history, people have felt the need to impart a personal and at once symbolic individual character to their dwellings by painting them and fitting them out. In western art and architecture this custom has resulted in the lavishly embellished palaces for which Venice is renowned as well. Mosaics, panelling, ceiling paintings, luxurious draperies, pieces of furniture, shining glass, mirrors and paintings reflected the status of their occupants and their history. The fact that there are now empty white walls available in the Palazzo Bembo for exhibiting art indicates that a historical and symbolic layer which once formed an integral part of the building has been peeled off. Whereas any work of art could fill this void, the assemblage that Heijnen applies establishes a bond with it.



A suspended shape, curled into a cylinder, covered partly with gold leaf, brings up associations with curtain fabric of gold brocade. The animal hide tanned to parchment calls up intimations of a hunting trophy or the slaughtered ox featuring prominently on 17th-century interior paintings. The significance of these objects does not coincide with mirrors, curtains and paintings. Sibyl Heijnen does not return to what the scene

was like once; rather, she selects new materials for their own character, their own design and markings, for their own scent. Together they constitute an added architecture, a movable, pictorial ensemble that gives the beholders food for thought, allowing them to acquire a different experience from the space. That experience engrains itself in the memory like a meaningful image.

And as neither she nor the visitors to the exhibition are the new occupants of this palazzo, she is not looking for idiosyncratic symbolism but for associations that everybody can relate to. Intuitively a dark rectangle with a bulging frame may be identified as the object of a painting, and another that reflects the light deep-blue as a mirror.

Rob Smolders



Gateway, Museum van Bommel van Dam, Venlo NL
1993 An installation with gilded rubber hangings, a lane of honour of eight meters long is a key work in Sibyl's oeuvre. One could refer to them as draperies with a modern face.



Look! Sibyl Heijnen, solo exhibition National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto JP
2007 Fifteen artworks made of materials as rubber, gold leaf and cowhide. Nearly 11.000 visitors in 5 weeks stood, sat down or lay on the floor, enjoying the soft touch of the 400 m² white, artificial grass as if they were enjoying a snowy world.



New Beginnings, Former Chapel in Ootmarsum NL
2009 Spreading 400 kg of pure white salt on the floor, using the marble altar as a carrier for a drawing of black charcoal, thus accomplishing a true transformation. In combination with her autonomous works this created a room for contemplation.



Cascade, City Hall Almelo NL
2015 Two hundred individual layered stripes made of handcut and finished high tech textiles transformed into two curtains. Totally nearly 100 m².



Room for reflection, Museum de Fundatie, Castle het Nijenhuis, Heino - Wijhe NL
2016 The unconventional use of material - such as the combination of rubber and leaf gold, animal hides, the modelling of construction materials, the painting with synthetic grass and the forms used, all combine to the ultimate monumentality that is so characteristic of Heijnen's work. 'Room for reflection' is all about metamorphosis.