

Ilse Ermen

Ilse Ermen (°1959, Magadan, Eastern Siberia, former USSR) is an artist who works in a variety of media. With a conceptual approach, Ermen tries to create works in which the actual event still has to take place or just has ended: moments evocative of atmosphere and suspense that are not part of a narrative thread. The drama unfolds elsewhere while the build-up of tension is frozen to become the memory of an event that will never take place.

Her artworks appear as dreamlike images in which fiction and reality meet, well-known tropes merge, meanings shift, past and present fuse. Time and memory always play a key role. By studying sign processes, signification and communication, she tries to grasp language. Transformed into art, language becomes an ornament. At that moment, lots of ambiguities and indistinctnesses, which are inherent to the phenomenon, come to the surface.

Her works directly respond to the surrounding environment and uses everyday experiences from the artist as a starting point. Often these are framed instances that would go unnoticed in their original context. By applying a poetic and often metaphorical language, she wants to amplify the astonishment of the spectator by creating compositions or settings that generate tranquil poetic images that leave traces and balances on the edge of recognition and alienation.

Her works are on the one hand touchingly beautiful, on the other hand painfully attractive. Again and again, the artist leaves us orphaned with a mix of conflicting feelings and thoughts. By contesting the division between the realm of memory and the realm of experience, she tries to approach a wide scale of subjects in a multi-layered way, likes to involve the viewer in a way that is sometimes physical and believes in the idea of function following form in a work.

Her works question the conditions of appearance of an image in the context of contemporary visual culture in which images, representations and ideas normally function. By investigating language on a meta-level, she makes work that generates diverse meanings. Associations and meanings collide. Space becomes time and language becomes image.

Her practice provides a useful set of allegorical tools for manoeuvring with a pseudo-minimalist approach in the world of art: these meticulously planned works resound and resonate with images culled from the fantastical realm of imagination. With a subtle minimalistic approach, she absorbs the tradition of remembrance art into daily practice. This personal follow-up and revival of a past tradition is important as an act of meditation.

Her works are given improper functions: significations are inversed and form and content merge. Shapes are dissociated from their original meaning, by which the system in which they normally function is exposed. Initially unambiguous meanings are shattered and disseminate endlessly. By manipulating the viewer to create confusion, she creates work in which a fascination with the clarity of content and an uncompromising attitude towards conceptual and minimal art can be found. The work is aloof and systematic and a cool and neutral imagery is used.

Her collected, altered and own works are being confronted as aesthetically resilient, thematically interrelated material for memory and projection. The possible seems true and the truth exists, but it has many faces, as Hanna Arendt cites from Franz Kafka. By putting the viewer on the wrong track, she often creates several practically identical works, upon which thoughts that have apparently just been developed are manifested: notes are made and then crossed out again, 'mistakes' are repeated.

Her works focus on the inability of communication which is used to visualise reality, the attempt of dialogue, the dissonance between form and content and the dysfunctions of language. In short, the lack of clear references are key elements in the work.