



Rebekka Benzenberg
Dream Baby Dream

Opening: 30.04. 4-9 pm
Exhibition: 01.05. - 21.06.2025

Exhaustion as an expression of resistance, depression as a silent but fundamental indictment of a sick system: in her exhibition *Dream Baby Dream*, Rebekka Benzenberg draws attention to questions that are only superficially personal and intimate. The motif of the bed is at the center of her pointed, finely tuned compilation of sculptures, sound and paintings: a tempting retreat and a hated sickbed at the same time. The bed – especially the unmade one – implies a body that tosses and turns in it, sweats and leaves traces of its presence behind. Artists such as Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois have established the bed as a cipher for the presence of female bodies and their sexual self-determination in contemporary art. Benzenberg draws on these role models and their impulse to make the private public and thus political. The artist focuses on the body made invisible due to depression and isolation and critically questions its pathologization: a perspective that looks at social contexts as a whole and understands mental illness as described by the British revolutionary collective Red Therapy in the 1970s: „A major form of reaction, of our bodies’ rebellion, against capitalism”.

The market for psychotherapies is flooded with offers that specialize in the elimination of symptoms but do not identify and address systemic causes as such. Benzenberg’s work “Tell me what you know about dreams, dreams”,

which attracts attention with its hypnotic light that wanders back and forth, is inspired by the approach of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR for short), which is intended to support the therapy of traumatic experiences through guided eye movements and is used, among other things, for soldiers returning from war zones. Benzenberg makes it clear how technology specifically intervenes in cognitive processes and is intended to maintain productivity and perceived normal stress tolerance. On the other hand, an unprecedented medialization and gamification of social life undermine precisely such efforts. The sound work “Or don’t you know what to look for?” fills the exhibition space in an endless loop with sounds from the puzzle game *Candy Crush*: an app that, like many others, targets the brain’s reward system by releasing a little dopamine with every candy puzzle solved. This creates the illusion of an accomplished or fulfilling task, but due to the endless nature of the game, the risk of addiction should not be underestimated.

The sculpture lying in Benzenberg’s specially made bed seems to be in this precarious limbo of therapy and paralyzing distraction. It is a cast of the *Düsselnixe* from Düsseldorf’s Malkastenpark that the artist has reworked and alienated. The gleaming white doppelgänger of Gustav Rutz’s work from 1897 is accompanied by another replica that appears

twice in the room: an echo of Richard Langer's bronze sculpture Flora, once freestanding, once mounted on a tripod like a spotlight. The original cast from 1920 – an interpretation of the Roman goddess of spring, naked and youthful in the look of German life reform – can be found behind glass in the Mülheim Stadthalle. The sculpture did not survive the unprotected public space, more precisely the Mülheim city garden. It was smeared, sprayed and one of its arms was chopped off. The artist's doubling of the sculpture echoes the last, unsuccessful attempt by the Mülheim city council to at least preserve a copy of the Flora made from plastic at its original location. Does this space offer her a newly created shelter? Or is it just condemning it to a shadowy existence? The veils that Benzenberg places over her sculptures make them recognizable as shadowy memories rather than living bodies.

Depression can be perceived as disembodiment; it also means isolation. In this respect, it goes well with neoliberalism, whose maxim holds individual interests above all else and demands adaptation from everyone. "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul", was Margaret Thatcher's principle. Writer and journalist Sophie K. Rosa recognizes the widespread attitude, particularly among millennials, that human life, like capital, must first accumulate value in order to be worth living. Otherwise, existential fear and depression loom – more than in any previous generation. „A sense of security among loving community is hard to come by, and solidarity with our neighbours perhaps even harder. [...] [S]peaking to each other, outside of private homes, transactions, workplaces or planned socializing, is uncommon, even considered suspect." So what happens when the heart and soul rebel?

Rebekka Benzenberg's exhibition is a monument to a condition that silently cries out to be overcome. This becomes particularly clear in her paintings and wall works, which show orphaned bedscapes and crumpled pillows and blankets. It

is not immediately clear from them whether the person lying here has left the bed permanently or only for a moment before returning to it. In any case, the bed does not appear inviting here, but rather oppressive. In "Peace will come and with it sleep" it not only occupies the entire canvas, but virtually merges with it – as if to say that under present conditions there is nothing more to be imagined and depicted than this oppressive imprisonment.

- Malte Lin-Kröger

(1) Sophie K. Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 2023, Pluto Press, S. 17

(2) Sophie K. Rosa, *Radical Intimacy*, 2023, Pluto Press, S. 19