



Wendelien van Oldenborgh, *Future Footnotes* (detail), 2018, mixed media. Installation view. Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez.

## Wendelien van Oldenborgh

### SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Wendelien van Oldenborgh's installation *Future Footnotes*, 2018, was a version of a new film in progress that will premiere at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin this March in an exhibition celebrating the centenary of the Bauhaus. The film is a major production with a highly complex narrative, involving the stories of Lotte Stam-Beese, one of the first female architects to be trained at the Bauhaus; Hannes Meyer, her lover and the school's second director; Hermina Dumont Huiswoud, a Guyanese anticolonial activist; and Langston Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance poet; as well as contemporary collaborators of the artist. It takes place in Ukraine, where all these characters find themselves for one reason or another; one learns their complex backstories from the exhibition text. The show included two large lenticular prints, each with three images that alternate when viewed from different angles; three video projections showing only white running text on a dark background; and, supporting these elements, a black-painted wooden scaffold—a structure that seemed to channel the aesthetic of modernist display design, particularly that of Frederick Kiesler. The prints showed figures, chatting or alone, in a drab Ukrainian housing estate in an area whose

master plan was designed by Stam-Beese. They were stills from the film, and the texts in the video were snippets from the conversations among its characters. The inclusion of stepped seating facing these works made it easy for viewers to change their position so as to see all the images embedded in the lenticular prints.

Thanks in part to this exhibition design, the viewer sensed the paradoxically strong presence of a narrative that was held inside the piece yet somehow remained inaccessible. One could get a feeling for the richness of the materials the artist is dealing with but glean very little as to what they could mean. One of the lenticular prints contained an image of three people in discussion in front of a drab housing project as well as one showing a woman speaking into what appeared to be a walkie-talkie and another depicting a solitary woman standing on top of a slide. This set of images might suggest some kind of tension, perhaps a scheme being hatched. The other print contained images of a woman in front of a blackboard covered in writing, the same woman (presumably) looking at architectural photographs in a book, and another woman absorbed in contemplation. These suggested intellectual activities, perhaps the research for the film itself. There seemed to be no direct relation between the photographs and the texts in the videos, so the viewer could only guess what the connecting narrative might be.

Yet however elusive and intriguing the underlying story was, the exhibition's most compelling aspect was the profoundly physical experience it offered via the most economical and elegant of means. To see the videos and the images embedded in the prints, one had to move around, go up the steps, stand up or sit down. And the installation made full use of the venue's quirky L-shaped architecture. The ceiling above the corner of the L is twice as high as the rest of the space, and Van Oldenborgh's structure used almost the full height of that space, directing one's gaze upward.

This sculptural statement, containing within itself the promise of a film to come, seemed to tap into the very origin of video installation, which, it could be argued, came out of Minimalism. The spatial and temporal character of Minimalist works, the fact that one has to walk around to experience them in time and space and in relation to one's body—what Michael Fried famously disparaged as their “theatricality”—helped make possible the emergence of video installations featuring multiple monitors or screens, with no cinematic beginning or end. In this compact and concise exhibition, Van Oldenborgh reversed this historical development, presenting a video installation that, although based on moving images, relegated content to focus almost exclusively on its own sculptural and spatial properties, reasserting the significance of physical structure.