

Explosive experiments

by Almut Andreae

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Art and science in dialogue: An explosive exhibition in the Brandenburgischer Kunstverein.

The tiny projectile had left a crater opening up into thin layers. A few milligrams of dynamite are enough to put a hole into a huge book in a fraction of a second. The contrast between the gaping perforation and the unchanged, impeccably white book pages around it couldn't be more striking. Which powers have acted here? The careful turning of the page reveals a completely new quality of the explosive impact: it has left a bizarre trace of minuscule lines on the book pages.

How can it be that destruction turns into beauty, that the partial blasting of a book makes one feel at the same time irritated and fascinated? It is not possible to get around questions like this when visiting the exhibition in the Brandenburgischer Kunstverein that opened on Saturday. The art that is shown here – the title of the exhibition is “Once Upon A Fraction Of Time And Other Stories” – extends the spectrum of contemporary artistic expression into an unusual dimension. The presented works by Irish-born artist Aoife van Linden Tol (born 1978) are based on her longstanding occupation with explosive agents. Nine years after she first got in touch with her high-explosive material she is still fascinated by the possibilities for her work. When she talks about how she uses blasting agents for her art, one senses a big amount of respect and experience from someone who knows exactly what she does.

After finishing her art degree in London Aoife van Linden Tol built a basis for her use of explosives in her art work by training as pyrotechnician and shot firer. In the beginning the (male) professionals smiled at her but today the spirited artist is an accepted addition on numerous blasting ranges. Especially on the premises of the German Federal Institute for Materials Testing (Bundesanstalt für Materialforschung und –prüfung - BAM) van Linden Tol is a well-regarded guest. The sponsorship of the Institute for her artistic blasting operations are a sign of the mutual appreciation, that is documented persuasively in this exhibition. The documentation of the scientific experiments of the Institute are confronted directly with the works of Aoife van Linden Tol. A video documentation by the BAM shows a test detonation in an autoclave (something like a pressure cooker for blasting experiments): a process that takes a millisecond from ignition to detonation in real time but is shown here in slow motion using high speed camera.

Van Linden Tol's artistic processes take other roads to de-celerate and materialize the blasting

operation: for example when the artist fans out stacked papers that were shot through in an explosion or presents the individual isolated sheets. Two years ago she was inspired by the shock and emotional investment with which people reacted to her work to use these emotions in an artwork. She asked friends and acquaintances for objects that were charged with strong feelings or memories to transform them by blasting them. The tangible results of this project – titled “Second Story” – are presented in form of cautiously blasted books in a display cabinet in the exhibition. One thing becomes clear: even though the approach and the motivation is different, the earnestness and the perseverance that the artist demonstrates in her long time explosive experiments is comparable to the rigour of the experimental procedures and questions of scientists.

The mutual enrichment of art and science is the topic of the exhibition series “Art + Science. Model and Imagination” that the Brandenburgischer Kunstverein established in 2006 and that found its exciting sequel in the productive collaboration between Aoife van Linden Tol and the BAM. The project is curated by Gerrit Gohlke – who in the current case was assisted by the artist Karl Heinz Jeron – and is planned as a series of events. The good will and patronage of the Ministry for Science, Research and Culture of the land Brandenburg are guaranteed.

Until 22 March 2009, Tuesday to Sunday 12-18 h, Brandenburgischer Kunstverein Potsdam, Brandenburger Str. 5 (Luisenforum)