

Leslie Hirst: *Skywriting*

Leslie Hirst is concerned with the culturally related and thus arbitrary relationship between things, words and symbols. She focuses on the distance between these elements, which in their day-to-day use are regarded as congruent. The interspace literally becomes the context, emphasizing the spatial and temporal relativity of everything that is present, discussed and described.

At the Kunstverein Baden the artist utilizes the long, windowless wall of the exhibition space to show her complete series of *Airplane Drawings* for the first time. During various flights, the artist recorded what she saw out the window on whatever magazines or advertising material were at hand. On the greatest amount of unprinted space available, she sketched the contours and structures she could discern in the geological formations and urban landscapes below. This unusual perspective, together with the constantly changing view through the window, demanded a maximum of spontaneity and a minimum of reflection. What transpires is a combination of glyph and graphic, of topography and typography that, despite the random nature of their concurrence, sometimes results in uncanny relationships. Suddenly the spaces intentionally left blank in the graphic design of the magazine become bearers of information that draw the narratives of all the images together in a dialogue. Over the nearly 15-meter length of the exhibition wall, Hirst shows the drawings as a row of windows reminiscent of an airplane, in which the horizontal projection of the aerial view is combined with the vertical projection of the drawings on the wall.

The end wall of the exhibition room displays the work *La Menzogna*, which Hirst created during a residency in Burano, an island in the Venetian Lagoon. In her photographs, Hirst removes Burano's picturesque streets and its rows of brightly colored houses, which are the primary attraction for tourists, in favor of the sky. What remains is a negative image of the photogenic town – it is the gap between the things that suddenly moves to the foreground. The interspace is given additional emphasis by arranging the individual cutouts in letters spelling out a passage from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*: "La menzogna non è nel discorso, è nelle cose" ("Falsehood is never in words; it is in things"). Depending on the perspective of the viewer, the status of the blue shapes vacillates between "sky" and "letter", and through this Hirst yet again addresses the relationship between language and the world, and the incongruence of these two elements.

(Verena Gamper)

Leslie Hirst is currently a guest artist at the AIR–ARTIST IN RESIDENCE in Krems as part of an exchange program with the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in California.