

# REBECCA ANN TESS

02.03.–28.03.2016

In her three-part video project (*Dad Dracula is Dead, A Crime must be Committed* and *Home Time Show Time*), Rebecca Ann Tess responds to role stereotyping in the history of European and American cinema and television. One technique she likes to use is re-enactments of scenes from well-known films. In some ways, this sets her within a tradition of feminist performance art.

In ***Dad Dracula is Dead* (2009)** the artist analyses several movies from the 1920s and 1930s, such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *The Soilers* (1923) and *Queen Christina* (1933). This was a period in the history of the big screen when Hollywood was establishing its production code, the moral compass that was supposed to guide American film-makers from 1930 onwards in the way they depicted things like sex and crime. With the help of amateur actors, Rebecca Ann Tess restages and alienates selected scenes and characters from the historical films. Repetitions and reinterpretations draw attention to the standardisation of gender roles, moral attitudes and assumptions about decency. Also flagged up here is a queer sub-text that gave film-makers some leeway to subvert the established norms.

In ***A Crime must be Committed* (2010)** Tess quotes and alienates typical scenes from genres like the crime thriller and heist and hood movies. She draws on different periods: the gangster movie of the 1920s (*Underworld*, 1927), film noir (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1941), neo-noir (*The Detective*, 1968), action films (*Die Hard*, 1988; *Shaft*, 1971 and 2000) and contemporary treatments of crime (*CSI*, from 2000). In sequences of alternating content, she traces the historical development of the detective as a character, his or her relationship with the criminal, and the shifting balance of power between these roles. The old theme of cops and robbers is thus treated in all its diversity. When casting the parts, Tess deliberately breaks with conventions and generates new images to stretch the viewer's visual imagination.

## Home Time Show Time (2012)

The last part of the trilogy widens this panorama to include television today, dissecting chat shows,

soaps and various entertainment formats. We see a group of friends zapping through the channels and discussing the authenticity and realism of specific programmes. The scene repeatedly changes, and the same performers appear in a fictional chat show called TeleMilano. Two of the friends assume the role of studio guests. The others take turns as media moguls Silvio Berlusconi, Rupert Murdoch and Donald Trump. During the talk, persistent efforts are made to stave off the media critique of studio guest Julia Jung and grant more space to the superficial, self-referential narrative of the other guest. It eventually emerges that the group of friends engaged in discussion are actually taking part in a casting show where the most critical participants are the ones allowed to stay. In the face of these perfidious tactics, effective media critique seems virtually impossible: criticism and subversion have already been incorporated so vociferously into the entertainment schedule that the wind is taken out of their sails.

In ***Orchids* (2008)** Helga looks back over her relationship, describing her marriage to a gay friend. The narrator herself is a voice off, and so this personal story is visually overlaid by found footage such as film stills, press photos and snapshots. Although these pictures have no direct link with the protagonist, most of them do seem to illustrate the verbal text to some degree. Now and again, however, the visual associations drift away from the flow of words to create an autonomous narrative with its own framework of significance. In this way the personal experience of a 72-year-old woman evolves unexpectedly into a fundamental commentary on love, sexuality, relationships, convention and friendship.

Rebecca Ann Tess (\*1980 in Annweiler am Trifels) studied Fine Arts at the University of the Arts in Berlin, Chelsea College of Art and Design in London and HfBK Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. She currently teaches at the Photography Department of Chung-Ang University in South Korea. She lives and works in Berlin and Seoul.