

HAMBURG

Annika Kahrs

PRODUZENTENGALERIE

The central piece in Annika Kahrs's exhibition "solid surface, with hills, valleys, craters and other topographic features, primarily made of ice" was a 2014 HD video of the same title, running just under twelve minutes. In this work, the artist, who studied with Andreas Slominski and Harun Farocki, resorted to imaginative as well as narrative devices to paint a portrait of Pluto—the dwarf planet traveling on an elliptical orbit in the outer reaches of our solar system—a heavenly body we know only from instrument readings and the conjectures and illustrations based on them. The subject is timelier than it may seem, as our vision of Pluto seems destined to change soon: Later this year, a NASA mission launched in 2006 will reach the orb and, for the first time ever, take close-up photographs of it. So far, even scientific illustrations of the planet have been based on speculation, and this imminent shift from imagined picture to actual depiction, according to Kahrs, is what recommended Pluto as the ideal protagonist for her work. She conceived her video as a projection in the double sense of the term: both literally, as projected light, and figuratively, exemplified by the speculative exploration of Pluto's topography narrated via voice-over.



Annika Kahrs, *Ich habe noch zwei gute Bilder gemacht* (I Have Taken Two More Good Photos), 2014, C-print, 9 1/2 x 13 1/2". From the series "Star-Filled Skies," 2014–.

ARTFORUM

The piece opens with an unobstructed view of the starry sky. Low and oddly mechanical white noise accompanies the picture. Initially, it seems to be a postproduction sound effect. A circular spotlight suddenly flares up among the stars, inevitably suggesting the moon or a pale planet. But after a few seconds, we realize that it is a technical artifact, a glitch from the image's construction, revealing the gaze into outer space to be an illusion. The starry sky is, in fact, a projection on the dome of a planetarium. Piece by piece, Kahrs then brings the technology underlying the illusion into the picture: The luminous disk slides down the "nocturnal sky," grazing the projector and the bottom edge of the dome; the camera pans over carpeted floors, concealed speakers, and the softly glowing monitors that the planetarium staff use to control the space shows. That sound, we now understand, is the operating noise of the equipment.

Kahrs creates an ambivalent filmic space: The sober-minded deconstruction of the apparatus sustaining the depicted illusion turns into a suggestive imaginative vision in its own right, exuding an abstract air of science fiction. Then she dispels this new illusion as well: In the video's third and final section, the lights are turned on in the dome, leaving the "planet" and projected stars as vanishingly pale highlights on the vaulted white ceiling. The camera stops moving as an offscreen voice narrates intricate descriptions of views of Pluto and its topographic characteristics. Though based on the most detailed data now available, this narrative is, in a sense, a kind of fantasy voyage, through a landscape no human eye has yet seen. The text was provided by Leslie Young, who leads the team that planned the New Horizons mission to Pluto: a vivid anticipation of what the planet looks like by the very person who will soon utterly change the way we visualize it.

"Star-Filled Skies," 2014–, a series of twelve photographs, similarly examines the interplay between the imagination and our sense of place in the universe. Kahrs asked acquaintances to take pictures of the nocturnal sky. She presented these works using text messages as titles, for example *Es kommen Sterne aber der Himmel ist immer noch hell ich bin draußen im Garten* (Stars Are Coming but Sky Is Still Light. I'm Outside in the Garden) or *Ich habe noch zwei gute Bilder gemacht* (I Have Taken Two More Good Photos). As in the video, the artist plays with the transfer of imagination, orchestrating a vicarious observation via data transmission—a sort of private New Horizons, and one as faithful to reality as a message from the outer edge of the solar system.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.



Annika Kahrs, *études cliniques ou artistiques* (still), 2007, DV video, 13 minutes.

ANNIKA KAHRS

GALERIA JOAN PRATS
BARCELONA
MAY 28 - JULY 24

On July 14 NASA's New Horizons spacecraft captured the first close-up pictures of Pluto. Timed to coincide with the flyby, Annika Kahrs's solo exhibition of video works included a recent piece about the dwarf planet, *solid surface, with hills, valleys, craters and other topographic features, primarily made of ice* (2014). In the video a spotlight plays over a starry sky, exposing it as the dome of a planetarium. As the lights come up in the planetarium, a voice-over offers a speculative description of Pluto's surface. The cosmos depicted is only a simulation, and Pluto a chimera within it.

A shot of a mountain range and a ruddy sun in *Sunset-Sunrise* (2011) fades to white as the camera zooms out. This image, too, is only a mirage—a projection on a lecture-hall screen suddenly washed in sunlight as the blinds in the room are raised. In *études cliniques ou artistiques* (2007) a woman performs a set of mysterious bodily contortions. These poses are based on late 19th-century photographs from Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital in Paris, where female patients were required (or induced by electroshocks or hypnosis) to reenact their “hysterical” seizures for the camera.

Kahrs insists, “I don't like fooling people.” But her works nevertheless underscore how unfixed the lines are between empirical and manufactured reality.

SAMUEL ADAMS

LEFT: COURTESY THE ARTIST, PRODUCENT; GALERIE HAMBURG, AND GALERIA JOAN PRATS, BARCELONA; RIGHT: YOUNG HAI