

IRIS KLEIN

Knittelfeld, Austria - New York, USA

08

Woods

Dark wood, black forest ...

Iris Klein's trademark puppet-figure emerges from this skinny stand of winter trees like an x-ray or a ghost. There's something odd about the light. At first glance, the figure looks like it is caught in the glare of headlights or a searchlight. But looking closer, we find the light has migrated to an incandescence pulsing from within. She's radioactive. Klein uses the art of silver gelatin printing in its most reductive form. A mysterious transference occurs during the printing process. Submerged within a chemical bath, the figure not only appears on paper, but assumes a spectral power. She is a messenger of sorts. She's neither prey nor quarry.

Woods is typical of Klein's remarkable use of black and white photography as a psycho-technical investigation. The image is affecting, but indirectly: there is no pathos here, no story. Using a limited number of elements, both visible and not, Klein's images experiment with presence. They're animations, in the most literal sense. Between 1998 and 2005, she produced a body of work in which a puppet - constructed roughly as her double - is photographed in set interior decors and forlorn rural landscapes. The poses and locations are intriguing, but the action all takes place inside the darkroom and outside the frame.

Inspired loosely by the artist's reading of Elfriede Jelinek's devastating novel *Women as Lovers*, *Woods* depicts the puppet as a rural woman in a landscape stripped of possibilities. She wears a bulky sweater and a knee-length Logan coat, her unstyled hair spilling out around the collar down beyond her shoulders. The wooded landscape she appears in is not the deep, dark woods of fairy tales - it's simply rural disused land, awaiting its inevitable but postponed development. Highly cinematic, Klein's work reminds me of the films of Michael Haneke with its ability to encapsulate the psychic texture of the landscape in the early 21st century.

There is a steady, mild eroticism in Klein's pictures that disturbs many viewers. Although the mannequin is female, the sexuality of these images isn't tied, especially, to gender. The puppet's face is consistently obscured - underexposed to the point of blackness - suggesting not just anonymity but multiplicity. Klein presents an eroticism that arises not from image but potential: something more lurking, animal, diffused like photographic grain, and utterly pervasive. In Klein's work, identity is purely situational.

Chris Kraus



WOODS, 2005 | Lambda print.