

Smoke Gets In Your Eyes

“When a lovely flame dies, smoke gets in your eyes,” from a song by The Platters is buzzing around in her head when she wakes up. The fire is out, but the smoke bites her eyes. She has burned the whole house down. “Woman burns down house!” they’ll write. Only the chimney is still standing.

The fireplace is like a backbone when you think of the house as a body. The actress Jayne Mansfield (1933–1967) also had a chimney in her Hollywood mansion, which she had painted bright pink. After the demolition, the fireplace made of rough-hewn natural stone remained standing for the time being. It no longer marked the transition between the interior and exterior, nor was it a warming place of comfort, but a ghostly relic in a ruin.

The images of such scenarios have been burned into our memory by horror stories, melodramas, and psychological thrillers. Fireplaces frequently appear in the mise-en-scenes from films. They enhance the already crackling atmosphere and fuel the suspenseful foreshadowing of the narrative’s reversal. As if through a keyhole or a crack in a door, we observe the lustful, eerie play inside modernist glass palaces or gloomy stone mansions in Victorian style. For his movies, Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980) constructed artificial architectures that charged the domestic with projections of the uncanny.¹

Looking at the cinema screen or into the TV is like looking into Pandora’s box, wherein fears, secrets and desires are hidden: “Something here inside, cannot be denied,” the song continues. There is a proven connection between the projections of sexuality onto architecture and onto the female body in film.² For the voyeuristic—usually the male—gaze from the outside, Hollywood cinema staged actresses as passive seductive surfaces. In moments of curiosity, however, the female protagonists actively drive the plot forward, for example when opening a forbidden door. Here, self-empowerment flickers behind the beautiful mask that has been put on them.

The examination of film and cinema has long played an important role in Melanie Ebenhoch’s artistic practice. With the installation *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, she provides for the first time a direct insight into this reference space. Alongside architecture and psychoanalysis, it forms the core around which her works and her thinking revolve. Painting and sculpture are at the center of her work, which she repletely combines. Since 2019, she has been developing a group of chimney sculptures, which previously were the painterly-sculptural framework for her paintings. In her new installation, she inserts the medium of film in the form of her own film montage and a selection of movies. On display is a spectacle of inner-psychic social conflicts that are ignited in domestic settings. With an ironic-affirmative gesture, Melanie Ebenhoch sets fire to the film images flickering in the chimney and thus to the projections of the subconscious generated therein.

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes (2021) is an installation by Melanie Ebenhoch, curated by Marijana Schneider and with a film program created in collaboration with film scholar Mary Wild.

Text by Marijana Schneider

¹ Steven Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007). For the uncanny in the domestic see Paolo Virino, “Familiar Horror,” in *Grey Room*, no. 21 (fall 2005), 13–16.

² Laura Mulvey, “Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity,” in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 53–71.

Melanie Ebenhoch

***Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, 2021**

Installation

Digital print on paper, wood, styrofoam, resin, acrylic paint, tv screen, film montage

Sculpture 180 x 130 x 65 cm, poster 85 x 59 cm

Film List

The Love Witch (2016) dir. Anna Biller

Vertigo (1958) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

The Money Pit (1986) dir. Richard Benjamin

The Invitation (2015) dir. Karyn Kusama

Secret Beyond the Door (1947) dir. Fritz Lang

The House That Jack Built (2018) dir. Lars von Trier

The Exterminating Angel (1962) dir. Luis Buñuel

Lost Highway (1997) dir. David Lynch

The Lodge (2019) dirs. Veronika Franz, Severin Fiala

Nostalghia (1983) dir. Andrei Tarkovsky

Artist Talk

Home Is Where the Uncanny Is Mary Wild in conversation with Melanie Ebenhoch about film will be released on the website of Haus Wien after the exhibition.

Melanie Ebenhoch lives and works in Vienna. In her works she often deals with the interactions of painterly and architectural spaces that are charged with projections of the subconscious. As in cinematic mise-en-scenes, she places pictorial effect above narration—often through the objectified female body. Melanie studied at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and the Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam. Her works have been exhibited internationally in solo and group exhibitions at Belvedere 21, Kunsthalle Wien, Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna; Hester, New York; Union Pacific, London; L’Inconnue, Montreal; amongst others.

Marijana Schneider is curator for contemporary art at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg where she curated and co-curated numerous solo, group and collection exhibitions with internationally renowned artists, whose artistic approaches are characterized by process orientation and installative works. Marijana’s curatorial work and writing revolve around expanded definitions of physicality and sculpture in space from an intersectional feminist perspective.

Mary Wild is the creator of the Projections lecture series at Freud Museum London, applying psychoanalysis to film interpretation. She teaches at City Literary Institute, and co-hosts Projections Podcast (a dialogue about psychoanalysis and cinema). Her interests include surrealism, horror, and representations of mental illness. She delivers auteur studies focusing on works by Michael Haneke, Gaspar Noé, Lars von Trier, Darren Aronofsky, Andrei Tarkovsky, and David Lynch. Mary has collaborated with renowned British art organizations including the Institute of Contemporary Art and White Cube.