

The Artist's Studio

In Rita Nowak's concept at the Kunstraum Bernsteiner, the set of assembled portraits is additionally charged by continually expanding the topos of staged photography through a variety of multilayered correlations: Rita Nowak uses the exhibition space as a studio; not only by taking photos, experimenting and presenting the results in the venue prior to the opening, but also throughout the entire duration of the exhibition. Earlier photographs are consistently supplemented by new works and are rearranged. Notions such as the exhibit deemed worthy of presentation, the portrait as a consummate photographic creation are expanded in content and impossible to extract from the context of artistic practice. The exhibition space serves both as a studio as well as an area of activity; the audience is appropriated by Rita Nowak as a model. The categories of model and recipient are suspended, similar to the manner in which the roles of model and artist already mirror each other in the work *Observing the Observing Observer*: the painter is painting the posing nude, with himself as the object in focus, and the photographer in the mirror is not only a self-portrait but first and foremost her own model and accordingly on level terms with the other protagonists as a subject. The situation is intensified by Rita Nowak due to the fact that all of the figures are naked. The historical cliché of painter and model designating feminine beauty and the superior masculine painter is corrupted and elaborated on; furthermore, in this instance it is the female point of view directing the two posing males. The references to art history are subtle and cautious, yet patently deliberate in their application.

By including this work in a space where the representation of art and the process-based nature of art are being conflated, its significance extends beyond the frame of the picture and is directly transferred to the events taking place in the room. The photograph not only presents the picture within the picture; just like the audience is turned into a part of the composition, with the exhibition space changing into the pictorial space, as which it will be subsequently captured and presented in another photograph.

Here, Rita Nowak demonstrates a playful yet rather enigmatic approach in confronting hierarchies, categories and realities; subtle, sensual and served with a generous measure of humour.