

“i?” by Shahram Entekhabi

Mar. 20th - Apr. 21st, 2004



The Berlin-based, Iranian artist Shahram Entekhabi presents at the PLAY Gallery, from March 20 through April 10, 2004, the exhibition project “i?”. The video “Happy Meal” shows a little girl covered with a chador (veil) inside a McDonalds restaurant; with rapture she is eating a menu that was created especially for children, labeled „Happy Meal“. Upbeat trendy Islamic songs in praise of Allah that are sung by children form the background sound for the video. Not only does the work confront two opposing conceptions of childhood with one another; the western consume oriented pragmatism versus the eastern, with its focus on spiritual well-being in the beyond, but it also points to a new dimension, a „third culture“. The girl suggests the symbiotic relationship between two cultures that allows for a new culture to germinate.

The current video production touches upon a related thematic complex: “i?” consists of ten episodes describing a day in the life of the protagonist O, played by Shahram Entekhabi. The video is inspired by Samuel Beckett’s film *Film*, starring Buster Keaton, a work already evoked by Gilles Deleuze in reference to his subdividing the moving image into images of action, images of perception, and images of affect. Like in *Film*, its predecessor, “i?” deals with the complex of seeing and being seen, observing and perceiving, and reflects on the famous dictum of the Irish bishop Berkeley: “Esse est percipi” (To be is to be perceived). In Entekhabi’s interpretation of the theme, however, the complex is expanded around the self and foreign perception through both a migratory perspective and the question of identity between two cultures. Therefore, in the film, the perspectives of the protagonist and camera continually alternate; and apart from the final scene, O’s face (and later the appearance of his “twin”) is never shown. The film begins and ends in a closed cycle within the protagonist’s apartment, with the action revolving at all times around O’s reflection.

The 12 minute video-film „Herr Karl aus Nemsä“ (Mr. Karl from Nemsä) is presented as being Shahram Entekhabis and Helmut Kandl joint project. Historic archive material from the beginning of the

20th Century taken from the Austrian State Museum displays images of the Islamic world. Paired with the sequence of pictures are quotations from the writer Karl May*. Prayer and religious chants make up



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the background soundtrack. Again, the differentiation within the specific nationalities and the prejudices against them, are examined.

As closing part of the project, the results of a five-day workshop that Shahram Entekhabi did together with nine youths and the “Next-Interkulturelle Projekte” are presented. Three video films were produced that reflect on Shahram Entekhabi work “i?” and deal with questions of identity as well as topics such as self-image, voyeurism and being the object of observation.

The exhibition takes place parallel to the project Far Near Distance: Contemporary Positions of Iranian Artists, on view at the House of World Cultures (March 20 to May 9, 2004), where Shahram Entekhabi participates with the installation Kilid.

*(Karl May is a German writer popular for his cowboy and Indian novels.)