

The sensitive and the mental

A city, an art exhibition in the public space, a vernissage evening. People greet each other, talk, take a drink. Some have already "seen" the exhibition, others are dispersing to the discovery of works. Those who have come especially for the event are walking around with a plan in hand, attentive eye, with the firm intention of spotting each artistic work. Suddenly, at the end of a park, a gathering: policemen, people gesturing, pointing out in turn at the neighboring buildings, the ground, their ears. Others call them from their balcony, question the policemen. All seem confused, incredulous. We are in a park lined with small buildings, and yet it is as if we were at the entrance of a traffic tunnel. The trucks follow one another, the cars pass, some motorcycles sneak, full gas. Where are we really? Where are all these vehicles? The noise comes from the ground, it seems to come out of several grids which cover, by fragment, a narrow underground passage. The police take out their torchlights, kneel down to examine the contents of the subway ... but no truck is in sight, no car or motorbike. Visually, nothing to report, and yet, many people, more or less troubled, wonder about what happens to them. The author of this disturbance of normality is Nika Spalinger, with the installation *Transit* she made in Biel in June 2000 for the exhibition *Transfert*. Invisible in a park that hosted several sculptures, this work paradoxically permeated the place with a direct, intense presence. She disturbed the residents, embarrassed the police, astonished the visitors. But what is the nature of the trouble she provoked? There is of course some kind of noise "nuisance". But it is also, and perhaps more so, the absence of a rational explanation for the presence of this noise that disturbs people. Because they do not understand an unusual situation, citizens call the police, who is confused in turn. The situation is comical, and the truth is certainly elsewhere. This is where one of the major strengths of Nika Spalinger's work lies. It causes sensory displacements that accentuate the intensity of the sensations in question. With the view, we are undoubtedly in the public park, with hearing we are completely in the tunnel. As the image does not match the sound, we try to focus successively on one then the other. Little by little, the two come together in a kind of non-place, a sensory mental space. Having reached this hybrid and fragile area, everyone can indulge in infinite imaginary developments.

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