

Body/Sculptures

by Hans Breder

Opening: Saturday, November 25th 2017 from 2 until 6 pm

Show: November 28th - January 27th 2018



FIFTY ONE TOO is honoured to announce its new exhibition 'Body/Sculptures' (1969-1973) by the renowned intermedia artist Hans Breder (Germany, 1935 - USA, 18.06.2017).

In this series Breder offers an experimental and conceptual approach to the nude portrait. This classical motive in the history of art is radically reconsidered by the intervention of mirrors, that deconstruct the body in a disturbing manner. Amidst diverse locations, such as the artist's studio, the shores of Old Man's Creek near Iowa, and the beach of La Ventosa in Mexico, Breder asked his models to pose for him holding rectangular mirrors in various ways. The looking-glasses form an important additional dimension that intervene in the image by cutting of the models' body parts and multiplying them in reflections elsewhere. The resulting photographs possess a surrealistic quality, picturing puzzling sculptures made up of body fragments and models that are often reduced to headless, deformed creatures.

These multilayered images challenge and confuse the gaze of the viewer. The use of a mirror is a clever intervention to transcend the limits of space and the human perception. By means of a reflective surface one is able to put in sight visual information that would otherwise be unreachable for the eye. In this way mirrors can be considered as an entrance to a parallel world. Especially at the beginning of his artistic career, this illusionary property inspired Breder to use mirrors and polished metal shapes to construct forms that hold the midst between reality and illusion.

In directing his models in all sorts of positions and manipulating their visualisation with the use of mirrors, Breder took up the roles of both photographer, choreographer and sculptor. At the same time the artist found a way to combine the volatility of performance and body art with the tangible nature of sculpture and the illusionary potential of the photographic medium. Therefore 'Body/Sculptures' can be considered as a first step towards Breder's intermedial approach of the arts.

Initially classically trained as a painter at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, Germany, Breder arrived in 1964 in New York to become the assistant of kinetic sculptor George Rickey (USA, 1907 - 2002). After temporarily producing constructivist sculptures himself, Breder gradually became involved in the conceptual art scene of the 1960s. Inspired by the social and political events of the times, voices raised to overthrow the traditional hierarchy in the arts and its material constraints. Breder actively contributed to this evolution as the founder of the pioneering and heavily influential Intermedia and Video Art Program at the University of Iowa, where he taught from the late 1960s until 2000. The program encouraged students to explore the artistic potential of combining different artistic and scientific disciplines in their work.

A well-known graduate of the program was the American-Cuban performance artist Ana Mendieta (Cuba, 1948 - USA, 1985) whose oeuvre was heavily influenced by Breder's notion of cross-disciplinary practice and encompassed sculpture, photography, film, performance and painting. Mendieta, with whom Breder maintained a ten-year relationship, often appeared as a model in front of Breder's lens, as was the case in the pictures on show taken in the Mexican La Ventosa.

Like Mendieta, Breder gained the most fame with his performance based intermedial work. This exhibition aims to show that Breder's early photographic work is equally indicative for his fruitful cross-pollination between various disciplines and ideas.

Breder was one of the first video artists to be featured in three Whitney Biennales (in 1987, 1989 and 1991) and his work is included in prominent collections such as the Milwaukee Art Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Breder's intermedia Archive found a permanent residence in the Museum Ostwall in Dortmund, Germany.