

Zitty (issue of Sept. 9 to Sept. 22, 1999)

### **Hey, Cutie?**

The gallery window advertises the Penelope Georgiou film nights with selected film stills. The attendant sells tickets at the cash register. Admission is one deutschmark. Student discounts are available for students; however, the film *Petunia* is off-limits to minors because it incorporates pornographic footage.

There isn't any popcorn on sale, but the gallery owner serves espresso in the backroom cinema.

The filmmaker's oeuvre can be viewed in daily portions on a large monitor in a room furnished with gray metal chairs from the US Army of the type usually seen in schools. A three-tiered cardboard cutout features the Vienna-based director as leading lady – a girlish figure with dyed red hair, photographed from a low angle, with laundry drying on the line and the blue Vienna sky as a backdrop. Georgiou designed the display – a self-portrait-cum-family-ties, so to speak – in collaboration with Heinz Späth, whose amateur paintings she had once presented as her conceptual contribution to an exhibition at the Vienna Secession. A brochure lying by the cash register guides visitors through the exhibition in the lobby. In the work presented in the show, Georgiou focuses on the same topic as in her films – her family. Drifting in from outside the door, we hear the sound of her father Tonis playing a Brahms sonata on the piano. Inside, her mother Eleni in a typical 1950's dress, waits to be photographed. The negative of the large-format picture is scratched. An untitled painting of Georgiou's brother Apostolos shows a roughly painted, sternly stiff man leaning slightly sideways by a lake. We see Penelope and her ex-husband Hans cooking together. A color reproduction of a comic drawn by her sister Petunia is displayed in a frame. Featuring dolled-up blondes and male models in Travolta suits and entitled "The Rich and the Poor," it tells the story of Lina, a humble servant girl who pretends to be from a rich family when she meets and falls in love with a hairdresser named Dimitris Apostolou at a swank villa. Translations of the Greek texts are available at the counter, in which one can read the then-ten-year-old author's reflections on the hypocrisy of the Cinderella-like class theme.

In 1970 Penelope Georgiou left her native Greece, then under military rule, to study acting in Vienna. Her performance in Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Karl May*, a mystical film monologue completed in 1974, is documented in a three-part photographic

exhibit in the lobby. Since 1980, Georgiou has participated in four films, the theater production *Kallas + Kennedy* by minimal club, numerous symposiums, educational films featuring her discussing various topics with the likes of Renée Green or scientist Isabelle Stenger, and a television ad advocating the humane treatment of animals. As "Kallas," she strides down red carpets and endless gangways, silhouetted in soft focus, and the lofty terms of theater criticism immediately come to mind: tragic, grand opera. The severely-parted hair, the mischievous glance at the camera – a playful wrestling match with the cameraman; the slightly hoarse voice, melancholy verging on the histrionic alternating with a teeth-baring smile – these are the leitmotifs of her ego-machine-like films.

"How long can you stand me?" she asks in her first film *Kunst ohne Höhepunkte* ("Art without Highlights"). She follows the question with comments on the psychology of the terrorist organization RAF and a drive with Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, during which they discuss politics and Brecht's didactic plays.

My favorite film is *Apostolos*, which Penelope Georgiou calls the "simulation of an improvisation." Her movements in front of the camera are at times reminiscent of Tai Chi, at times of a boxer skipping in the ring (*Na, Süßer?* – "Hey, Cutie?"). Deceptive alliances with the viewers, the stale smell of hard work, presumptuous thinking are presented to the audience. She defines the frame of the image by striding and moving her arms; she imposes breaks; inappropriate passages are censored and replaced with minutes of black frames accompanied by her reading her own texts. "Her films are directed at the visual arts in much the same way those of Straub and Huillet are directed at literature," writes Diedrich Diederichsen. This detour renders Penelope Georgiou's films immune from falling into the traps of rigidly-executed avant-garde film or Viennese Expressionism.

JOCHEN BECKER

Until September 18, Galerie Kienzle & Gmeiner, Bleibtreustr. 54,  
Charlottenburg, daily except Sun. and Mon., film program from 5:00 p.m.,  
Tel: 31507013.