VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE

Elina Brotherus

Elina Brotherus, Walking Beuys

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Finnish photographic artist Elina Brotherus has gained international recognition for her self-portraits, diary-like series, landscape photographs and situative images. Since the late 1990s, her photographic art has been notable not only for its distinctive aesthetics and visual language, but also for a unique atmosphere that lends the work a playful yet profound, existential dimension.

The artist herself appears in nearly all of her photographic and video works. A departure from the more introspective series that defined the early work came in 2016, when Elina Brotherus began to probe the conceptual and performance art developments of the 1960s and ‘70s. Her artistic exploration of the Fluxus movement, of John Baldessari, John Cage, Mieko Shiomi and Francesca Woodman, included, among other things, reinterpretations of historic art actions and of film/video documentation of performances (known as “Event Scores”). With her new interpretations Brotherus creates homages, at times poetic, at times

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cryptic, to her 20th century precursors, with whom she enters into a dialogue that is both tongue-in-cheek and respectful.

In this context Elina Brotherus spent about two years delving into Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), not so much Beuys as a performance artist, rather as the unmistakable icon of the 1970s with the Stetson hat, fishing vest and white button-down shirt. She herself adopted one of those signature items, the hat, as if to help her get under his skin and better come to grips with him.

With the hat, Brotherus becomes a fictional character, a Beuysean reminiscence that in every image uses her own aesthetic language in a self-staging enacted from her own perspective, in terms of content and references intrinsic to her own work. In this vein the protagonist appears on visits to places that were important stations in Beuys's life, such as the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, the Lower Rhine region and Venice, but is also seen at destinations where he had never been, including Deauville and Istanbul. Here he is a travelling companion, a kindred spirit in her intellectual and visual world.

From one picture to the next this fictional narrative increasingly takes on a life of its own, becoming a new coherent cycle in the stringent conceptual work of Elina Brotherus.