

Interview with Nina E. Schönefeld

Realized by Rose Merriman
on the occasion of the exhibition

WATER(PROOF)

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<http://momentumworldwide.org/exhibitions/waterproof/>

Curated by Rachel Rits-Volloch & Tainá Guedes

I was welcomed by Nina E. Schönefeld in her studio in Prenzlauer Berg. Her studio was full of sculptures she had made of old electronics and costumes that actors had worn in her video work. I sat down on a small grey couch that had a sheep's fleece draped over it. Nina sat on a stool beside me. As she talked, she moved



her hands and the gold bracelets she wore would musically hit against each other. In Nina's work, her protagonists are often women and are often dealing with the aftermath of climate change. My first question was if she sees women as leading the fight to save our planet.

“The main themes in my works are often linked to our current political situations. In the scenes of my movies, I deal with political activists, also with outcasts, preppers, hackers and sometimes with people from the secret service. That is a very male-dominated world. So I decided to create heroines in my science fiction movies who work as helicopter pilots, hackers and political activists who go underground. I see this act as a motivation for women to trust themselves, to speak up and to fight. You can already see that in reality, that there are a lot of great women changing the world e.g. Carola Rackete who is a boat captain and saves refugees every day and Andrea Röpke who fights against right wing movements over decades as an investigative journalist.”

My next question was about if she saw her films as an encouragement to women to be more active in roles in our society and political movements.

“Yeah, totally. I hope it’s encouraging for women. My movie heroines are inspired by great young women like Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Yara Shahidi and Carola Rackete. But also by women who died a long time ago and fought for women’s right to vote and liberation in general. I love Amelia Earhart who always wanted to work in male dominated fields and never gave up on getting the permit to fly planes. I choose male dominated themes like political hacking & activism, technical & dangerous professions and investigative journalism because I personally love to work in these fields too. I love to work with technical machines and a big part of my work is to research like an investigative journalist.

The thing is, I try to tell stories with the movies. My first movies were more like collages. And then I thought, as fine artists, why can’t we take on stories? Like an ongoing Netflix series for example that is more open. The good thing here is that I am an artist. That gives me the chance to combine

scientific research and story telling without being criticized for wrong methods in my professional field. I quote the aesthetics of various formats and genres – from blockbuster series like Mr. Robot or classics of cinema history like Clockwork Orange to computer game tutorials, scientific documentaries and high-end streetwear videos by Gosha Rubchinskiy & Balenciaga. In all my movies I tell stories about women who decide to leave their conventional lives to fight for political democratic rights. The movies can be read as episodes in a potentially never ending series.”

We went on to discuss *Dark Waters*, the work that is featured in Momentum Worldwide’s exhibition, *Water(Proof)*.

“*Dark Waters* is set in the year 2029. All the oceans are so contaminated with plastic waste that they have become death zones. The only creatures still able to live there are poisonous jellyfish. The government is trying to keep this eco-disaster secret. The film narrates the risky quest for the truth by female helicopter pilot Silver Ocean. She finds out that her little sister has disappeared out of the blue. The little sister was always fighting for nature and against polluting the seas. And then the pilot begins to realise what is important. She has lost her sister. Everything is polluted and she works for the bad guys... Black Cloud. She decides to



leave everything, her normal life, to try and rescue her sister. The ending is open... I try to make clear that it is always possible to start to fight.”

Even though her videos are often dealing with the aftermath of environmental disaster, Nina wants there to be always a feeling of hope in her work; “I had a discussion with the curator at the Berlinische Galerie when I had this exhibition there. The curator was writing “post-apocalyptic movies,” and I said to her that I like “post-apocalyptic,” but you also must implement the positivity of my approach. I still think that it is possible to make a world wide climate & political change especially when people start to fight now. It will make an impact. That is very important. That’s why I am fascinated by women like Amelia Earhart. Never give up, be belligerent, live your dreams and try to add something new to the world. Maybe that is a female characteristic, to not let go and to be more persistent than men.”

