

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

Sophie Thun ***Stolberggasse*** April 30 – June 21, 2020 Grafisches Kabinett

Information for the press: available on Wednesday, April 29, on www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell/
Start of the live stream for press: Wednesday, April 29, on www.secession.at/en/exhibition/sophie-thun/

From April 30 until June 21, 2020, the Secession presents *Stolberggasse*, an exhibition by the Vienna-based artist Sophie Thun. Conceived specifically for digital dissemination, the show can be seen as a live transmission on the Secession's website www.secession.at/en/exhibition/sophie-thun/.

The dialectical interrelations between the scene of production and the work's presentation, between the setting of the artist's labor and the physical presence of the body, are recurrent themes in Sophie Thun's photographic oeuvre. The places where she exhibits her work often serve her as points of departure for photographs that show how her body imprints its presence on them. For her exhibition at the Secession, Thun further developed this approach and adapted it to the necessity of digital dissemination. The artist sets up her darkroom in the exhibition space, where, working in isolation, she makes photograms of all objects in her apartment in Vienna's Stolberggasse. The inventory of things she arranges on the photosensitive plates ranges from toothbrushes and kitchen utensils to books, from tools and paper clips to scrunchies. The only disqualifier is an object's size: to match the medium, it must not exceed the 8x10" of a large-format negative.

In addition to the implements of her craft and the steadily growing collection of black-and-white photograms, the installation also includes the multipart color photograph *Looking at the Window Kabinett*, a full-scale trompe-l'œil recreation of the window behind it, which was boarded up to plunge the room into perfect darkness. The view from the window, the connection to the outside world, remains an illusion, referring the searching gaze back to the interior. In the picture, it is always the same time of day, the same season, another symbol of stasis that reads both as a nod to the paradigm of photography as a moment frozen in time and as a reference to the current lockdown.

While visitors are barred from physically entering the Secession's building, surveillance cameras installed in the gallery enable them to watch the action in real time on the website. Crucially, Thun does not only display the fruits of her labor; allowing us to see her at work, she prompts us to reflect on the places, mechanisms, and performances associated with art production, unfolding a multifaceted scrutiny of its processes and prerequisites. For one, on a very concrete level, she showcases the sophisticated technique of analog image-making, which we can watch in the red light of the darkroom from the moment of exposure of the individual objects under the enlarger to the development of the black-and-white baryta prints.

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No less importantly, her body and its actions repeatedly become motifs of image-making, figuring both in the online video feed and in the contact prints, where the artist's hands holding the objects in place emerge as white silhouettes. In light of the virtually complete isolation from each other imposed by the authorities as part of the measures against the coronavirus pandemic, Thun's transferring her project into the digital realm also raises questions concerning the complex interplay between self-motivation, heteronomy, and surveillance. Given that someone may be observing the exhibition space at any time, those phases when the artist is not within the camera's field of view and appears to be doing nothing take on equal importance: there is no telling whether they are to be interpreted as well-deserved time off, laziness, or productive idling.

One of the niches and corners not covered by the surveillance cameras is the flight of stairs through which visitors normally reach the gallery. Thun revisits her playful engagement with the interfaces between living space and production site, between private and public spaces, by reproducing the worn walls of the stairwell at her home on Stolberggasse with their old-fashioned stenciled paint pattern and presenting a photograph of herself on the mezzanine landing. In this self-portrait, a characteristic form in her practice, Thun alludes to the conventions governing the depiction of the (nude) female body in general and more particularly to Marcel Duchamp's iconic painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) and its afterlife in art history. For the complex composition, she cuts up the negatives of several shots and reassembles them such that the captured poses relate to each other. The flagrant sexual overtones are intentional, yet any objectification of the female body or voyeuristic cathexis are undercut by the artist's self-determination—holding the remote release, she is always in control of her image—and the assertive gaze with which she fixes the beholder.

Sophie Thun was born in 1985 and lives and works in Vienna.

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.
Curator: Annette Südbeck

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Artist's book

Sophie Thun. Secession

Format: 18 x 33 cm

Details: Swiss broschur, softcover, thread binding, 208 pages

Concept: Sophie Thun

Text: Sophie Thun in conversation with Daniel Spoerri

Secession 2020

Vertrieb: Revolver Publishing

EUR 33,-

The artist's book "Secession" that Sophie Thun has designed in connection with the exhibition adds to this appeal to the viewer to understand artistic practice through a production-aesthetic lens rather than focus on the finished work alone. Dozens of test strips, a byproduct of her labor in the darkroom, and a notebook containing technical information document the tentative character of her process, giving the viewer a sense of how she arrives at creative decisions—while also bearing witness to the all-important question: How to begin ...?

The Secession remains closed until mid-June.

The exhibition Sophie Thun. *Stolberggasse* can only be visited via live stream on www.secession.at/en/exhibition/sophie-thun/.

Press contact

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Press images

Installation views are available for download at www.secession.at/en/presstype/preview/ and www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell

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Sophie Thun. Stolberggasse Grafisches Kabinett

Exhibition dates April 30 – June 21, 2020

Livestream www.secession.at/en/exhibition/sophie-thun/

Artist's book Sophie Thun. *Secession*, 208 pages, € 33,-

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