



RINEKE DIJKSTRA *rehearsals*

MUSÉE: *For The Gymschool, you filmed students from the Zhemchuzhina Olympic School in St. Petersburg. When did you first learn of this school and what initially fascinated you about it?*

RINEKE DIJKSTRA: In 2014, I was invited to participate in Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg and to create something new for it. A year earlier, I had worked on a project for the Dutch National Ballet in Amsterdam. In collaboration with choreographer Ton Simons, I did a piece portraying dancers just before and just after a rehearsal. The video was incorporated into the choreography and became an integral part of the performance. That fueled my interest in working with dancers. So, the Manifesta invitation came at a good time. Russia has a long tradition of ballet. The idea of choosing rehearsals as my subject led me to a school for rhythmic gymnastics in St. Petersburg.

MUSÉE: *What do gymnastics and ballet represent to you?*

RINEKE: Both gymnastics and ballet demand that you go to physical and mental extremes. Dancers and gymnasts have to keep pushing past their limits to reach a high degree of perfection. During a performance, everything has to look effortless, even though very often it isn't effortless at all—both dancers and gymnasts have to suppress their true emotions. I wanted to make a portrait of a child rehearsing, to investigate the tension between ability and inability. For the video *Marianna*, also shot in St. Petersburg in the same period, I used three cameras to film a young girl rehearsing before an audition for a place at the prestigious Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg, which

focuses on training its students to perform in the Mariinsky Theatre. The girl has to keep rehearsing the same sequence over and over again. The teacher, who remains unseen, issues an uninterrupted flow of instructions, going on and on until it's almost too much for the viewer to take: "Start over, one more time, smile, extend." The film shows Marianna's struggle with technique, but it also explores the question of whether she can still be herself under those circumstances. Is there really such a thing as a 'self' in the arts? That also makes the video a character sketch, a portrait. It was filmed with three cameras, so she's often shown full length, but you can also see the telling details of her facial expressions. In the video *The Gymschool*, I used two cameras simultaneously to film young gymnasts doing floor exercises. When I attended rehearsals at their school, it struck me that the children look almost like sculptures during certain movements—abstract sculptures, I mean, twisted into such strange positions that you can't tell where the head is, or the arms. At the same time, those 'sculptures' look very different when you look at them from different angles. This installation was based on the idea of the human being as a sculpture—dehumanized in a sense, but also displaying very unusual aspects of being human.

MUSÉE: *How did you approach filming this project? Was it different from the way you approached your previous video works, *The Crazyhouse* and *The Buzzclub*?*

RINEKE: For *The Gymschool*, I first attended a lot of lessons and rehearsals. Out of those experiences, I developed the idea, and then the form emerged in a



more or less natural way. But new perspectives also presented themselves while I was filming. I like to make the process central to my work. If you make all the decisions in advance, it becomes tedious and predictable. For each of those projects—*The Crazyhouse*, *The Buzzclub*, and *The Gymschool*—I built a studio, a white box, where I could control the sound and light while I was filming. This approach also fosters a kind of concentration. The studios are always built on the location itself, so the subjects feel connected to their usual surroundings. By having them work inside this improvised studio, I create a space to open up possibilities—a place where things can happen.

Working on *The Gymschool*, I realized how I could use sound to emphasize their concentration. In *The Gymschool*, all you hear is the gymnasts themselves thumping, shuffling, and breathing. That heightens the sense of intensity.

MUSÉE: *Is there a connection between this work and The Crazyhouse and The Buzzclub, which are also*

about dance and performance? What kind of progression do these works represent?

RINEKE: For *The Buzzclub* and *The Crazyhouse* I did the same thing, building studios in the clubs, but I approached these projects from a different angle. For *The Crazyhouse*, I asked young people to dance to their favorite music. This led to a series of portraits of people surrendering to the music, losing themselves in it. In the process, they offer us glimpses of their personalities.

Showing the work in an exhibition space, *The Crazyhouse* takes the form of an installation. That's a deliberate choice. Since the projected images move from wall to wall, the viewer becomes much more conscious of the space. You have to move along with the images. Meanwhile, the intensity mounts over time. The first girl, Megan, seems a little insecure as she moves along with music, while Philip, the next-to-last dancer, is effortlessly absorbed in the music for a full ten minutes, giving a stellar performance.



MUSÉE: *The Gymschool starts with an eight-year-old girl and ends with a twelve-year-old. What is the significance of their age?*

RINEKE: The progression in age contributes to the structure of the film. Going from younger to older children, you can see their technique gradually improve. The video starts with an eight-year-old girl who has trouble keeping her balance as she lifts one leg out to the side. When she puts her foot back on the ground, it makes a loud thump. The video shows that by mastering their bodies and improving their technical skills, the girls achieve ever greater freedom, flexibility, and expressive capacity. The last girl is so accomplished that she's painful to watch—almost like an insect shifting effortlessly and silently from one form to another.

MUSÉE: *How did you choose your subjects?*

RINEKE: The process of casting is always fairly intuitive. I never choose the classical beauties. In-

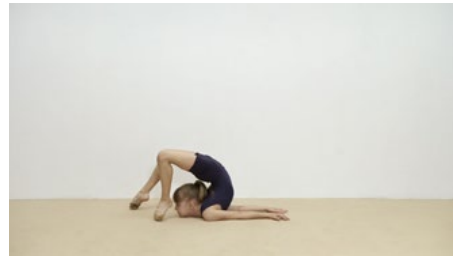
stead, I look for personality and individuality.

MUSÉE: *To what extent did you direct your subjects in this project?*

RINEKE: I try to work with what they do spontaneously and to give them as much freedom as I can. I like surprises, and in *The Gymschool* especially, they could do things with their bodies that I could never have imagined. You have to know in advance more or less where you're headed; but at the same time, you have to give ideas a chance to grow and leave room for whatever happens in the moment. Things never work when I have a fixed idea before starting a project. It's always better to observe, to improvise, and to see what kind of possibilities show up.

MUSÉE: *What surprised you during the filming process? What did you learn from the time you spent filming these girls?*

RINEKE: Their discipline and their physical capabili-



ties. The seemingly laconic way they do exercises you didn't even realize the human body was capable of.

MUSÉE: *Comparisons have been made between these works and your Beach Portraits, which also explore the confidence and vulnerability of youth. How do you feel you have evolved in these new works stylistically, conceptually, or otherwise?*

RINEKE: In the *Beach* photos, *The Gymschool*, and *Marianna*, I paid very close attention to the poses

and forms they adopted—the sculptural quality. In the case of the *Beach Portraits*, I always felt you should be able to walk around them. My special interests include abstract forms—the things people express with their bodies and isolation always plays a major role. When you keep the background simple, everything you show the viewer becomes important. You draw more attention to details that might go unnoticed in everyday life. But at the same time, your subjects become more abstract because you remove them from their everyday context.

MUSÉE: *Are there particular moments you look for that you try to emphasize with editing? What is your editing process like?*

RINEKE: I used two cameras for filming, which recorded the same thing—one in a wide shot and the other in close-up. The basic idea of the project was to film the exercises from various angles—as if the children were sculptures—which you can view from different perspectives and in different manifestations. That makes the order of the images very important. The temporal

sequence can help you build up a very special kind of suspense. There are eleven children in the film, shown roughly from youngest to oldest. It's as if each one passes the torch to the next one, in a kind of relay race. You usually see the same girl on two or three screens at once, but sometimes there are two different girls. I edited the videos so that the difference is not always visible at first. There's the tension between the moments when the girls seem almost drained of personality and the moments when they're highly individual and strikingly unique. That tension is central to this work.



Top images: ©Rineke Dijkstra, *Marianna (The Fairy Doll)*, 2014.
One-channel HD video-installation, surround sound, 19 minutes, 13 seconds, looped

Bottom images: ©Rineke Dijkstra, *The Crazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee)*, Liverpool, UK, 2009.
Four-channel HD video installation, with sound, 32 minutes, looped