

BRADWOLFF PROJECTS
presents

maya watanabe
earthquakes

curated by madelon van schie

opening 4 february 16.00 - 18.00 hrs
the exhibition runs until 4 march.

*"For an earthquake, one instant is sufficient to destroy long-standing illusions."*¹

The exhibition *Earthquakes* in Bradwolff presents the eponymous video installation by Maya Watanabe from 2016-2017. Two videos record sudden and disruptive events that take place in an empty theatre in Japan. One video shows the scenario at macro level, the other at micro level. Against the background of a mysterious and ominous soundscape, the storyline unfolds around an aquarium and a seemingly ordinary planter. Until that one inexplicable, devastating moment when chaos takes over and the threat turns into a sinister disaster scene. After this disconcerting break, the sequence of events starts again. Unnoticed, the situation has been restored to its original state.

¹ Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World* (2015), p. 225. The quotation originally comes from Alexander von Humboldt's travel report. He wrote it after he had experienced his first earthquake. That was on November 4, 1799, in Cumaná, Venezuela.

² Alexander von Humboldt, *Kosmos: A General Survey of Physical Phenomena of the Universe, Volume 1* (1845), p. 227.

Watanabe's filming is slow and controlled, and her movement is - just like the course of time in the work - circular. This way she gives the impression of objectivity, distance and control, as if she is trying to conjure the catastrophic events. Nonetheless, the contrast with the sudden drama is great every time. The explorer Alexander von Humboldt described an earthquake as an event for which one moment is sufficient to destroy long-standing illusions. Everything that seemed solid and familiar suddenly turns out to be a delusion. "We are undeceived as to the repose of nature; every sound - the slightest rustle in the air - sets attention on the stretch; for the first time we mistrust the ground, which we have put our feet on for so long."² In *Earthquakes*, exactly that illusion is emphasized. 'Nature' is not only staged and scaled, the disasters are also heavily directed, all within a theatre.

The video can be regarded as a metaphor for radical events that can completely disrupt ones life. In previous work, Watanabe placed herself in relation to Peru's traumatic past, which was a major interruption of peace and order of another kind. However, the earthquake is not a random symbol. In a time when our quality of life increasingly seems to be determined by the vagaries of nature, the work also refers to the uncontrollability of our natural surroundings, albeit in a highly controlled and artificial setting. At the same time, the disasters in *Earthquakes* seem to have a purifying effect. Established certainties are swept away and rebuild themselves, again and again.

Maya Watanabe (1983, Peru) has taken part in exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Matadero, Madrid, Das Fridericianum, Kassel, at Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco and at film festivals including Videobrasil, Instants video, LOOP and Madrid Abierto. Her work is currently also on show at De Garage in Rotterdam. Watanabe has worked as an audiovisual designer on theatre productions in Spain, Austria, Italy and Peru. She lives in Amsterdam and Madrid.

With *Earthquakes*, Bradwolff Projects offers Watanabe a unique opportunity to present her work for the first time in a solo exhibition in the Netherlands. The serene dome space of the former 'Burgerziekenhuis' furthermore creates an intriguing contrast with the tangible threat in the video installation, and thereby contributes to the alienating character of the video installation.

Madelon van Schie (1982, the Netherlands) is an independent curator and works for the Defares Collection and the ProWinkoProArt Collection. She studied art history at the University of Leiden, VU Amsterdam, and the Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires. Van Schie also holds a master's degree in Latin America Studies from the University of Amsterdam. It was her interest in art that reflects on political violence and dictatorships that initially led her to the work of Watanabe, which she has continued to follow ever since.

The soundscape was made by sound artist OMFO (www.omfo.net).



BRADWOLFF
PROJECTS

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