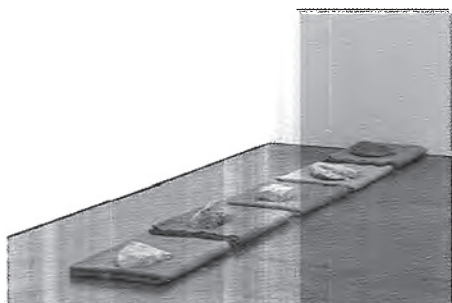


FLASH ART

September 2009 By Raimar Stange

HELEN MIRRA

GALERIE MEYER RIEGGER - BERLIN



HELEN MIRRA, 33 Bergwanderwege 2009, Installation view at Galerie Meyer Riegger, Berlin 2009.

The American artist Helen Mirra has created a surprising installation for the Berlin branch of the Karlsruhe Meyer Riegger Galerie: “33 Bergwanderwege” (33 Mountain Hikes), which is as minimalist and conceptual as it is wonderfully poetic. Helen Mirra collected stones from the mountains for this convincing show in the course of extensive

hikes in the Swiss Alps. Then a day later she went back to the place where she had found them and took a photograph. Both the stone and the photograph are installed in the gallery, and in such a way that it is impossible to see both at the same time: you have to turn round and walk a few paces, “hiking” from the stones, which are carefully laid out on Swiss military blankets, to the snapshots of their home environment. There is also a mural in show, presenting a programmatic text: “Rock, Ground, Blood, Mind, Blanket.”

Helen Mirra uses a variety of aesthetic categories here as a matter of course, borrowed from Roni Horn, for example, Joseph Beuys or Hamish Fulton, so that her artistic work conceived by these means can end up representing an approach that Mirra herself calls “pan-psychism.” This “pan-psychism” imbues the stones with consciousness, or more precisely: a “stream of consciousness,” and thus accepts nature as a living part-

ner. Of course it is simple to laugh off ascribing life to the world around us in this way as esoteric. But with the legendary scientist Jakob Johann von Uexküll’s “theoretical biology” at the latest it becomes possible to take Mirra’s approach seriously, an approach that is as modest as it is definite. Von Uexküll develops a concept of the environment that defines it as a tissue of meanings and signs. These meanings are generated by subjects that can be both human or non-human in their nature. This kind of new definition of subjectivity, which thus becomes a revaluation of our relationship with the environment, provides Helen Mirra with an aesthetic narrative for “33 Bergwanderungen”. This is essential, given the climatic changes that have already started, as our egoistic exploitation of the allegedly soulless environment is one of the key causes of climate change.

(Translated from German by Michael Robinson)

—Raimar Stange