

***Growth Record* - Lisa Spilliaert**

From 29 September until 22 December 2017

The exhibition *Growth Record* by Japanese-Belgian artist Lisa Spilliaert takes place on two levels in the darkened corridors of the Beursschouwburg – an intimate setting which contributes to a fitting atmosphere for Spilliaert's personal and autobiographical work. Four video works that together form a whole are projected onto large free-hanging screens: They are the first four episodes of a growing film project featuring a Japanese toddler. As the title suggests, the collection of films shows Spilliaert's annual documentation of the child's development: from cute baby to lively four-year-old. It turns out to be a little boy the artist feels an unusual affinity with. Through a spoken narrative, Spilliaert bluntly declares that she had a sexual relationship with the father shortly before the boy's birth. As a result, the arrival of the baby engendered new feelings and thoughts in Spilliaert around traditional legal-judicial discourses of genealogy and motherhood.

Since then, Spilliaert has been travelling to Japan on a yearly basis to meet with the father at improvised locations – at a playground, in the car or in a museum – in order to spend a few hours with his son, who could have been hers. While the artist carefully and playfully approaches the child, the father watches from the sidelines. The underlying motivation: capturing the ultimate portrait. Using an analogue camera, Spilliaert tries to draw the boy's attention to the lens, whose behaviour becomes more whimsical each year.. *Growth Record* demands time and patience, just like steadfastness is essential to deepening and maintaining relationships. *Growth Record* addresses much more than just a child growing up. The work speaks of Spilliaert's annual journey from Belgium to Japan and her determination to grasp and understand an exceptional bond that is difficult to fathom. From the ever-growing series one can slowly derive Spilliaert's ethos of relationships. In that sense, *Growth Record* can be considered a double portrait.

Between two film projections, a wall-mounted light box displays the result of Spilliaert's annual visits. On view are eight full-length film rolls of thirty-six exposures. Besides portraits of the boy – some of them more successful than others – , the rolls also include banal photographs of places and people Spilliaert photographed rather coincidentally. After all, *Growth Record* is a work that encompasses several temporalities. On the one hand, the work grows in parallel with the continuous ageing process, or at least as long as the boy agrees to Spilliaert's visits. On the other hand, the artist works with imposed technical restrictions. If the temporality of the medium film reflects the speed, movement and elusiveness of life, then the materiality of analogue photography offers an illusion of stability, understanding and familiarity.

Despite the autobiographical and anecdotal nature of *Growth Record*, Spilliaert addresses larger issues and concerns of her generation and the contemporary world. Not only does her work call biological and social views on kinship into question, it also subtly opens up new perspectives on female emancipation, gender relations, and intergenerational and sexual relationships – in short, the sort of commitment Spilliaert considers her life's work.

Laura Herman

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