

NATHANIA RUBIN, DAISY'S BIRTHDAY . by Anne van Leeuwen

In his essay *Non Multa Sed Multum*, Roland Barthes claims that "life (art, gesture, effort) must undesperingly bear witness to ineluctable dissolution." With this simple statement, we are brought to heart of the matter, the very nerve of Nathania Rubin's drawings. At first glance, these drawings appear classical in their frequent use of iconographic references and figurative form. And yet, upon closer inspection, it is clear that as Rubin invokes these tropes, she simultaneously puts them into crisis. In her use of iconography, Rubin frequently makes reference to the historical figure of Anne Frank. However, the multiple incarnations of Anne Frank invoke this iconographic figure in a way that traverses and confounds the space between allegory and fantasy, history and fiction, as well as other and self. Indeed, Rubin makes use of iconography as a form of self-portraiture, yet one that approaches the self-portrait, in turn, as the creative and imaginative space of fantasy. In this sense, it is not the symbolic identity of an icon that is repeated throughout her work; instead, these repetitive deformations constitute the uncanny (non)identity of Anne Frank. In Rubin's use iconography, the icon must bear witness to its own dissolution to the extent that it exists only through these deformations. But this is just to say that, in Rubin's work, the meaning of iconography is profoundly transformed.

No longer simply the ossified symbol of a melancholic historical consciousness, no longer affecting the pseudo-coherence of a monogram, in Rubin's drawings Anne Frank is undesperingly transformed and transfigured insofar as her identity becomes ineluctably entangled in Rubin's explorations, constitution and dissolution of her own. In a word, Rubin animates Anne Frank, thereby returning the figure to a state of animus and the iconographic symbol to the dissolving current of temporality.

The animate quality of Rubin's drawings thus allows her to renegotiate the temporality of the figure. Indeed, in virtue of this temporality, these drawings exhibit a strikingly ambivalent and perversely photographic quality. For example, the distinctively photographic composition in "Ballet or Theater" (2011), its apparent reference to vernacular photography, is unsettled by the palimpsestic quality of the figures. In this drawing, it is impossible to determine whether these figures are coming into being or passing away, whether they appear to us as not yet complete or in the process of erasure.

Rather than preserving the spatial configuration of physiognomic form as a way arresting the flow of time, we catch sight of figures in a state of becoming, dissolved in varying stages of formation and deformation. In this way, Rubin's figures essentially elude stasis. The figure exists only between incomplete figuration and erasure, as though, as Barthes puts it, "it were a question of giving visibility to time, to the very tremor of time" that is the gesture of her drawing itself. Before her drawings, then, we are caught up in the unfolding of the gesture of drawing, the drawing as gesture and this dissolving tremor of temporality.

Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Ibid.



Wary Anne . 2009 . graphite on paper . 61 x 45,8 cm