

**Rebecca Ann Tess, Not Dad Yet Sad!**

**Opening on September 3, 2010 between 06.00 and 10.00 p.m.  
in the presence of the artist.**

**Exhibition runs from September 4 through October 9, 2010**

The installation *Dad Dracula is Dead* is the first part of a video-trilogy in which Rebecca Ann Tess deals with stereotypical figures of the European and US-American history of film and TV. By using the technique of *re-enactments* Tess points to the process of production of this history. The title refers to the film *Dracula's Daughter* from 1936. And also the other films that are part of the performative research of *Dad Dracula is Dead* were filmed in the twenties and early thirties, in the time when silent movies were replaced by sound films: *Anders als die Anderen (Different From the Others)* (1919), *The Soilers* (1923), *Mädchen in Uniform (Maedchen in Uniform)* (1931), *Queen Christina* (1933), *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935). It is the time of the "Motion Picture Production Code" that ruled since 1930 what could be shown and said in Hollywood and above all: what could not. Still, exactly these films were able to put a *queer* subtext between the lines, to invent – for the sake of amusement – women in pants, homosexual cowboys or female vampires killing virgins – against all narrative logic. These films not only inform about hegemonic ideas of the sexes and sexuality, but also about the non-represented queer culture that turns into stereotypes in the films. This is Tess' starting point. In a filmic set that – not dissimilar to a proscenium stage – consists of three partitions that are coated with stills from the cited films, lay-actors pop-up like ghosts in front of the historical filmic *Doppelgänger*. Dialogues are repeated, modified, pitched differently. A voice-over gives stage directions and information regarding the history of the films. It remains obscure what is the original text and what is a new interpretation in this loop that wants to interrupt the stream of film history. With her work Tess stands in the tradition of feminist performance / art that examines the possibilities of change through bodily execution (in 2008 the Akademie der Künste Berlin exhibited in the show *re.act.feminism – Performancekunst der 60er und 70er heute* a synopsis of these strategies). Different to re-enactments in the arts, that often deal with faithful replica of historical-political incidents or with performances, Tess works with the tool of estrangement and tries out the possibilities of causing a change by repetition, of freeing the figures from there stereotypes without being too optimistic. In the exhibition *Dad Dracula is Dead* is shown as an installation in the scenery of the film. The viewers can sit on the black stools that served as props in the film. The film itself consists of shots that show the public watching the lay-actors perform, gazes are exchanged; again, through the situation of the viewers, a feedback towards what is shown is created.

The exhibition is completed by a series of seven photographs called *From the Greenbelt*. Again, this group of works questions norms, respectively what is and

remains outside the norm and therefore invisible: *missing image* is the title of each of these pictures that are numbered consecutively. The starting point of this work is the pose that is varied and tested in the photographs: what happens if feminine persons stand up with their legs apart – half challenging, half provoking, with a direct, offensive gaze? On an esthetic level the series reminds us of the dramatically photographed fashion editorials, on a level of content, it deals with the problem of being outside: being in the public space, being outside (and not in a protected inside space) when being in the urban space, appropriating this urban space. *From the Greenbelt* investigates the public space by visiting – in the photographs – the rims of the urban in the night. Floodlights place bright spots in the darkness, they brighten the place that is transferred into a scenery that serves a staged scene: the bank of the river, the park. Five of the pictures display the performance of the pose in different configurations – and thereby check its (sexual) potential. The staging refers to the specific choreography of encounters at places like public cruising areas, it proves that these places can be considered areas of possibilities of queer desire. This impression is supported by the intense color of the pictures. The almost lurid green of the bushes where the female protagonists linger seems to transgress the border of the picture. In harsh contrast to that two more photographs concentrate on the place and the absence of an event. The colors are faded, the images exposed longer. The surroundings become visible in the half-light. These pictures deal with the loss of the images as well as with the possibility of violence and *gay bashing*, that transforms cruising areas to crime scenes. The scenes and places, produced performatively in the photographs, point to the potential of real places of queer culture: even though Tess' work is not at all documentary, her images remind us of pictures like the *Pier Photographs 1975-1986* by the chronicler of New York piers, Alvin Baltrop, who has been rediscovered only lately. Like *Dad Dracula is Dead* the series of photographs resembles a test arrangement with which the analysis of and the longing for missing images is started.

Maja Figge, Berlin, August 2010