

Nimm Abschied

Stuttgart, Pragfriedhof, 2000

Twenty quotations, silkscreen print mounted on PVC tarp, attached to fence segments.

Between May 5 and July 30, the Pragfriedhof (cemetery) was opened up as a place for an exhibition project titled “Auf Leben und Tod” (To life and death), curated by Gerd Dieterich

A long, narrow path leads to the gate of the cemetery. I selected this site as a place to free up thoughts that might express the incomprehensible in words, while at the same time questioning the existing cemetery rules.

Florian Matzner, from “Mein persönlicher Friedhof,”
on the work of Karolin and Daniel Bräg, excerpted from the catalogue
“Auf Leben und Tod” 2000

If you enter the Pragfriedhof in Stuttgart from the Heilbronnerstrasse, in order to get to the entrance with the “crematorium, mortuary, and ceremonial halls,” one aspect in particular becomes blatantly obvious: high fences on both sides of the paths separate the living from the dead, or, conversely, protect the dead from the living. In a way that is coincidental, architecturally speaking, as well as exaggeratedly symbolic, this narrow path abruptly becomes a sluice leading from life to death, and anyone treading it is simultaneously taking a brief journey into his or her own ego.

It is here that Karolin Bräg has set out large, white plastic tarpaulins whose size and proportions echo the rhythm of the surrounding fence segments; on these tarps, brief quotes are printed in an unobtrusive typeface, which suggests a sense of objectivity. The quotes have been filtered from intense,

hours-long conversations between the artist and people whose personal circumstances have forced them to confront their own mortality or come to terms with the deaths of others. "There's no talk. There's a burial ... Coffee is drunk ..."

Is there anyone who is not familiar with the speechlessness that arises in the face of death, the moment that inevitably confronts everyone at some time, even though no one wants to imagine this moment, let alone take the time to calm down and prepare for it?

The artist contrasts this speechlessness with specific words, statements, and thoughts, which are not taken from collective social rituals, but are, instead, the distinct, almost intimate statements of individual human beings. However, the fact that the quotations are taken out of the larger conversational context, set apart and fragmented, gives passersby the chance to link the before and after with their personal situations—as if they could take these single sentences from another person, with his own store of thoughts, fantasies, fears, and ideas, and add them to their own, to make a complete story.

The specificity of the personal statements in this the medium of public presentation—something like a poster wall—force the passersby to examine them for at least a moment, so that they become aware of the mechanisms of forgetting and repression. Moreover, by making the statements public, effectively lifting their anonymity, a taboo is consciously negated; the protective mantel of silence is penetrated, but there is no countermove to establish a different-ritual of some other kind.