

# SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

## JENNA WESTRA – THREAD SONG

**June 7 until July 13, 2024**

We are happy to announce *Thread Song* by New York based artist Jenna Westra, her third solo show at the gallery.

When gallerist Anne Schwarz spoke of a red thread running through Jenna Westra's new body of work, Westra thought of the words *Thread Song*, and they stuck to her mind as the show's title. Without a direct English equivalent, the 'red thread' stems from the German idiom 'ein roter Faden', describing an underlying theme, a core motif, a recurring aspect leading the way.

Subtle meanings or sound qualities can get lost in translation, while at the same time, new ones are created. In this case, the rhyme of the two English words – 'red thread' – gives a poetic, lyrical tone to the expression. A similar tone weaves through Westra's visual language, too. She makes compositional rhythms out of female forms, framing them in feminist histories and present-day feminine solidarities. Her pictures transmit female strength, energy, and softness.

Describing herself as working 'more like a painter', Westra uses multi-layered images and precise arrangements of forms that seem more closely connected to the stability of painting than to the unpredictability of photography. By borrowing from a variety of media, Westra traverses boundaries and generates painterly compositions with sculptural solidity and photographic depth.

Through her camera lens Westra often sees her collaborators and herself simultaneously. In her recent work, *Self Portrait (Held)*, we see the photographer in a mirror: she is the primary form in the image's composition. A model's two hands and a leg emerge from behind, supporting the mirror for Westra to make the picture. Three central components of her work meet here, gathered in the mirror: camera, collaborator, and photographer. The gesture of the model creates the impression of an embrace, wrapping limbs around the mirror and around the artist's reflected image, fostering a sense of connection and togetherness.

Westra states: 'Sometimes I make pictures that capture a feeling of in-betweenness, people moving from one pose to the next, though some images are more mannered and intentionally posed.' Whether incidental and fleeting, or intentionally choreographed, the

feeling of in-betweenness she talks about is evoked by gestures of movement and touch. One almost gets the sensation of physically feeling the visible touch.

In contrast to most other works on view, *Candle Picture 3* depicts a touch that is not taking place. A centered candle has just been blown out, but it's not clear by whom: white smoke floats upward in circling paths. This smoke is the sole element of the picture to suggest movement – like a white brushstroke pulled across the black backdrop. On the left, an upright fragment of a female form faces away from the candle and out of the pictorial space. An arm, bent and steady, enters from the right. Where usually bodies in Westra's images suggest movement, here they seem to be halted. Familiar rhythms and conditions are reversed.

Westra often works with female dancers, whose grace lends a lightness to their poses. They are framed by soft curves and malleable structures that the artist finds in props from everyday life. A large leaf in *Leaf Gestures*, a long-limbed potted plant in *Dance with Plant*, a transparent piece of shimmering silver fabric in the series *Slide Projector Stage*.

Mirrors, re-photographed prints, and light projections make twins of the subjects of some of Westra's images. These elements also open up ways to visualize the passage of time, as seen in the works from the series *Kayla 2018/2024*. The printed backdrops with which Kayla is posing were made in 2018, six years prior to the most recent photo session. In bending and entangling poses, the model engages with an image of her younger self. Narrative requires time: we see Kayla and Westra interacting with their own past experiences and selves. As viewers, we reflect on possibilities for interaction with our own memories, in relation to our present state.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf envisioned a space for women to create freely, to think and express themselves. That room could be seen as one origin of the images that Westra weaves now in her studio, into photographic fabric. The studio in *Thread Song* becomes a transformative space for the interlocking threads of bodily autonomy, artistic invention, and human interdependence.

We look forward to welcoming you at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY. The opening will take place in the presence of the artist on June 6, 2024, from 6 to 8 pm.

We will be happy to send further press material and images: [mail@schwarz-contemporary.com](mailto:mail@schwarz-contemporary.com).