

## Janaina Tschäpe's "100 Little Deaths"

Sept. 24, 2018

While roaming around the National Museum of Women in the Arts, I was immediately drawn to Janaina Tschäpe's series, "100 Little Deaths." What could have been nicely composed vacation photos felt interrupted by the artist's body lying face down, as if waiting to be discovered by a horrified passerby. Though the intent may seem morbid, Tschäpe likens her experience shooting this series from 1996-2002 to "writing a diary of the places I wanted to connect to" and clarifies that the photos encapsulate "me dying, or living a little history," per the museum's description. Tschäpe's photos combine the history and atmosphere of the location with an invented reality, creating a new way of experiencing places by writing herself into the history of the site

When I look at the series, I feel a silence in them. Tschäpe's deaths don't appear cruel; it seems like she was going about her day and suddenly dropped dead. There is no blood, wounds, or signs of a distraught death. She somehow fits in with the scene while challenging it to accept her death. According to the series description at the museum, her work dealt with solitude in nature. I felt that was well conveyed through the photos, as there was no visual clutter to distract from her two main elements, the location and her death.

The scenes Tschäpe photographs make us feel like we accidentally stumbled upon an untimely death. In real life, I would avert my eyes upon realizing what I was witnessing and immediately call for help. But as I interact with this series, I'm invited to look longer, almost voyeuristically, at the melancholic scenes and process the death, ironically, as something fresh in each photo and vital to the history of the location. I also feel that with some of the photos, they couldn't totally pass as vacation photos; there's something off-kilter due to the angles necessary to account for her death, whether achieved through a bird's eye view or a lower angle.

One of my favorite photos in the series is one where she lies face down on a balcony on a sunny day. The chairs and tables are in order, and the only thing out of place is Tschäpe on the ground. The photo was also taken from a low angle to capture her body lying lifelessly on the ground with a calm, clear ocean in the background. The pristine scene must accommodate her body and artistic perspective. The death will live on in the photo as we wonder if someone will discover her, but in real life she removes herself from the scene to die another day.

At the National Museum of Women in the Arts:



JANAINA TSCHÄPE

b. 1973, Munich

**Selections from the series "100 Little Deaths," 1996-2002**

Chromogenic prints

Gift of Heather and Tony Podesta Collection

As an art student in Germany, Tschäpe was involved with the ideas of German Romanticism and particularly the motif of the individual alone in nature. She created a series of one hundred photographs (NMWA's collection includes all one hundred works) during a period when she traveled extensively and worked alone. "I was just using my own body and inserting it into these landscapes. It was emotional because it was like writing a diary of the places that I wanted to connect to," she says. "It was the idea of me dying, or living a little history."