



exhibition at Raum X, Düsseldorf, DE, 1997

SIL HERSELF

Myriam Thyes, 1997, 14 collages, each 30 x 77 to 38 x 96 cm

Still images from a VHS copy of the movie *Species*, photographed from the television; prints of the photographs cut out and collaged.

SIL is the main character in Roger Donaldson's science-fiction thriller *Species*, which was hugely popular both at the cinema and on video rental in 1995–96. The plot of the film is simple: using genetic engineering, researchers create a hybrid by combining a human woman with the DNA of an alien intelligence (which later turns out to be a predatory aquatic mammal that grows, learns and transforms at an unpredictable rate). The hybrid, known as SIL, escapes from the research laboratory – as a cool, beautiful blonde (played by supermodel Natasha Henstridge) with the sole aim of reproducing. Five researchers, police inspectors and profilers hunt her down to prevent this and kill SIL. When SIL feels threatened and defends herself, she takes on the form of the alien and kills without mercy.

Under the pretence of dealing with science and an alien enemy, this film projects every conceivable cliché about (evil) women onto SIL. She is a psychopath who kills men before or after intercourse and regards other women merely as rivals. Her behaviour is instinctive and childish, without any understanding of ethics or social behaviour. At the same time, she displays the traits of a self-assured, strong woman: she actively chooses her men, is determined and single-minded, intelligent, quick, strong, unconventional, non-conformist and fearless. SIL has the characteristics of a 'super-human'. Through concentration, she can heal herself and instinctively recognises genetic diseases in others. She looks like a 'pure-blooded Aryan' propaganda figure from a Nazi poster. Yet SIL is also confused, lonely, feels like an outsider, dreams of her 'other half' and does not know what she is doing 'here'.

In the video still collages, portraits of SIL's human side are allied with her form as an alien monster. She looks at herself, at the other side of herself, and is smiling, amazed or worried. She makes contact with that part of herself which is demonised and hunted by society. 'Beauty and the Beast' is one and the same being.

