

Riddling Imagination incisions in the world of everyday myths

For more than a decade, Wolfgang Zurborn has investigated the relation between photography and public space, while not trying to depict urban landscapes objectively, nor investigating human behaviour the way a journalist would. Rather he has posed a philosophical question by means of photography: How far is it possible for a subject in the digital age to attain individual cognition and performance in an everyday public context?

Everyday worlds and the worlds of images dialectically merge in the subject's mind: views of the perpetually changing Lebenswelt are unrecognizably bound to the omnipresent pictures from the mass media.

To Zurborn, traffic terminals, concert fields, stadiums, shopping malls, business and entertainment parks are the zones the media invade, where the relation-ship between man and public space take on new aggregate states of individual cognition and action. Classical urban architecture's mission to create urban spaces, intelligible institutions of power and design public squares and loca-tions for social communication and the orientation of free citizens has faded into the background.

In the city centers, as well as at the former city borders, perfectly functioning arenas of entertainment arise, towers of capital, consumer malls, transit spaces for pedestrians and passengers, who meet accidentally, only to immediately disappear again, densely packed and yet isolated, without any distance or reflection. Names and meanings are given these ahistorical and artificial worlds from outside, through pre-fabricated events, soaps, brands and slogans.

Wolfgang Zurborn has roamed these non-spaces. In his blindingly flashed, colorfully packed, obliquely cut "pictures of people" he depicts the living chaos of individuals, how side by side and almost in slow-motion they follow their media dreams, thus becoming "picture people" miles away from themselves, from each other and from their desired images. The subtext of these photographs lies in the wide gap between the ironically twisted documentary substrate and the subjective perspectivation.

From the stream of impressions, stills are taken, that function politically, because they ask about the influence of popular myths on individual existence, but without offering handy solutions. Photography proves to be an ironically collaged counterforce. By means of the "split view" it radically explores the leeway left to personal perception and confronts it with the perfectionist totality and the standardizing mind- set of the mass media.

In the "Labyrinth of Signs", Zurborn puts this concept to its hardest test yet. His method of compressing disparate perspectives onto one picture plane and stressing the diversion of motives by a decentered composition is carried to extremes in the vertical photo - combinations. The aesthetic value of perspectival individuation can thus fully unfold and reveal the visual dissonance of today's public space.

The radical cut - outs of the super- mounted photographs intensify the network character of these works. Every partial picture has a sensual artery of sharply focussed and blurred zones. Their particular degrees of abstraction create a subtle balancing act between the free act of associative view and the undeniable reference to social reality.

In the situational single pictures of the series "Menschenbilder - Bildermenschen" (People Pictures - Picture People) the contingent scenic context is maintained through sophisticated eccentric compositions and, at the same time, fractured by countless indications beyond the picture's edge, the off.

In "Labyrinth of Signs" the alleged coherence of the world, the supposed unity of space, time and place has been basically shattered. The fragments of everyday perception have been reduced to the limits of recognizability. At stake is the identification of each fragment and the exploration of its contextual importance by the viewer. Zurborn: "The materials, planes, colors and lines acquire the character of strange signs, become part of a visual riddle and start to interact, beyond the boundaries of the particular segments. The meaning of this riddle is that there is no solution. Photography produces a maze of signs".

What is staged is the confrontation of the carefully searching eye with the multi-contextuality of the world and its perpetual transformation as well as the genealogy of the photographic gaze this side of the tautological clichés, an inventive view that challenges the viewer to a productive completion . The virtual scenery in which things meet or collide is no longer outside the photographic view, not in any given order, but is grounded in the perceiving imagination of the subject.

Wolfgang Zurborn's photography sees itself as the medium of an active process of understanding that corresponds to the dynamics of what, in the end, is uncontrol-lable about public space. Glassy see - throughs, rough superimpositions, irritating distortions, massive blocks and porous crevices, low - key transitions and daring leaps, seeming insides and tricky outsides, semantically balanced conglomerates and more narrative - oriented collages - the compositional range of the "Labyrinth" works is broad, in order to capture the experience of today's everyday perception in its living complexity and its rapidly accelerated change.

Peter V. Brinkemper