

Landscape-Mental-Pictures. About the work of Horst Jösch

“Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The works of the photo artist Horst Jösch (born 1966) are suggestive pictures removed from reality standing beyond real time and place, based on impressions of nature, landscape and architecture. These works taken with an analog view camera belong to subjective staged photo art. By varying depth of field and superimposing different space and image layers the artist raises perception of nature and landscape into the surreal and visionary. Nature seems close and far, real and unreal at the same time. The large scaled and brilliantly colored artworks are imaginations and illusions, which confuse and take possession of the beholder. They create individual spaces of interpretation for nature and landscape: this becomes the projection screen for ideas, values, dreams, ideals and emotions. An internalizing effect emanates just from the unfocused areas in the image, whereby real matter is turned into something visually subjective. The longing of being one with nature and a sense of its estrangement on one hand and the respect for its beauty, sublimity and need for protection on the other is transformed into a picture in a poetic kind. The photo-pictures of Horst Jösch, created in conceptual series, emit an intuitive and through the knowledge of natural sciences guided receptiveness for natural phenomena and processes – for its mysteries and ultimately its inscrutability.

The landscapes of riverside meadows of *La Serena II* (since 2007) float between pristine and endangered, bright and gloomy. Nature appears in a familiar strangeness and disturbing beauty. Caught in an aura of virginity and inviolability, the pictures of *La Serena II* enable a subjective empathy with the landscape as a reservation of desire. The beholder is immersed into enigmatic-mystical images of nature, which obtain this expression in particular through wide areas of blurriness. The swampy, morbid-seeming images of wood mediate a mood of melancholia and *tristesse* and appear as soulscapes removed from reality. “Animistic still life”¹, a circumscription the artist uses for his entire work fits best this group of works, as a verbalism of a subjective tune of nature and self. *La Serena* is named after a city in Chile, birth country of the artist, meaning serenity as well as calmness in Spanish and referring to an artistically conveyed original sense of nature and the grandeur of creation.

The picture series *Close to Green* (2009-2010) refers to an ambivalent tune of men and nature and an irredeemable utopia of a truly enriching coexistence. Natural and architectural subjects engage with poetic and magically dismal connections. The plants occur as a memorial of an urban civilization established on neglect of nature. On wild growing plants carried into the studio the artist projects slides taken by him, which show man’s habitat only in a fragment – facades, murals and walls with tubes, railings and technical details, and then photographs these spatial compositions. Through the slides the plants are more lit than made transparent, so that its green and own three-dimensional presence are preserved in the picture. Its drop shadows are reproduced in the photographic background, which – vexingly – at the same time is the foreground. Leaves and blossoms become projecting screens and reflect the light. They veil and disguise what they likewise pretend and embody. The colors and shapes from the slide superimpose the natural green, so that the leaves appear harmfully infested. The flora in the artistic projection of *Close to Green* can disrupt a variety of unnatural and hostile space structures, which it had to give way to and virtually reoccupy. Superimposing different images of reality and thereby conditional effects of light creates the pictures of *Close to Green*. A multilayered reciprocal relationship results from projections, mirroring, reflections, and shadowing. The innate space of the picture is interleaved additionally by reflecting

surfaces like windows or mirrors in the slide's motif. Hereby spatial coordinates as front and rear, inside and outside, close and far are shifted and kept unclear. The pictured species, be they twining, blooming, thorny, perforated or piled as foliage, give rise to uncommon-common, paradoxical spatial impressions. This collage of spatial-visual layers is predicated on the experimental imprint of photography by Dadaists and Surrealists in the 1920s and 30s. Through strange irritating and from reality-abstracting photographic ways of depiction Horst Jösch creates pictorial spaces with a mysterious-auratic atmosphere. The pictorial poetry emanates from an esthetic of the paradox and the absurd, the irreconcilable and, yet of the perception of reality. According to Susan Sontag "surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world"². In *Close to Green* the floral messengers of nature are lit with light and then photographed. This procedure of exposure of plants is reminiscent of the earlier series of photo works *Flower Power* (2006-2008). As homage to nature photograms of flowers are created, which without using a camera, depict just the plants own expressiveness as abstract silhouettes on photo paper. This optically deliberate confusion with reproductive layers and the use of photography as an artistic filter for perceptive pictures is shown modified in several series of Horst Jösch's work. The view through the camera becomes a personal approach to nature – both motivic and technical. The artist puts the creation of a picture itself on the same level with the natural phenomenon of photosynthesis. Through conversion of light plants receive energy to renew themselves – this vitalistic principle is referable metaphorically to the artistic doing and directly to photography as a picture of light as well.

In the four works of the series *Against the Odds* (2010-2011) the elements of nature; earth, air, water and fire are depicted as four different types of landscape and at the same time cast symbolically as natural disasters, which can be the aftermaths of elemental forces. Like in *Close to Green* different layers of picture and reality are combined by projecting slides of landscape panoramas and cityscapes onto installed settings in miniature size in the studio. The images of reality and the illusions of reality become newly evoked **picture-worlds** with ambiguous sceneries of a split between nature and men by the means of defocused areas. Derailed freight and gas cars, destroyed houses by overthrown trees, floodings in a metropolitan area and burning trees close to a house at the edge of a forest, staged in front of the depth of the projected views of nature, refer to the disequilibrium of nature caused by humans. This all appears visionary and allows ambivalent and fatal precognitions. **Suspense** is kept between elemental and destroying forces immanent in nature as well as natural catastrophes ignited by men. This all happens *Against the Odds* – against all prefixes and against the existential dependence of human life on nature.

Contemporary photo art imitates, alters, explores and invents nature. In doing so, abstractions of truth and delusions of perception are created by unusual perspectives. Since the 1990s art photography has positioned itself newly, particularly in the digital era by using its own delusive means. This progress was reflected for instance in the exhibition of the artist society of Bielefeld with the title *Out of the Camera*, only by means of the camera in 2006.³ For the philosopher Roland Barthes photography characterizes itself from its origin as "wirkliche Unwirklichkeit (real irreality)"⁴. A whole range of outstanding artists of the present manipulates just by analog means. A continuous and inseparable scrutiny and **exaggeration** of reality is taking place up to the hallucinational. The photo artists Miklos Gaál (born 1974), Walter Niedermayr (born 1952) and Thomas Wrede (born 1963) work with differently applied and combined stylistic devices of photography like selective blur, picture-in-picture effects, games of deception with perspectives and model sizes. New illusionary realities are created through varied artistic forms of „Entwirklichung (derealization)"⁵. Reality of life and of the picture overlay themselves perpetually in the perplexing permeation of artificial and natural, two- and three-dimensional, staged and documented, idyllic and menacing. In the artistic disposition of landscape as model and backdrop it becomes clear that this cultivated, urbanized, and denaturalized nature always has been manipulated. The photographic art of the present has created esthetic inventions and socio-critical portraits of landscape. Tightrope walks are visible between medial analyses of photographs as autonomous pictures and pictorial-poetic forms of

expression, which show a rudimentary shimmer of new romanticism, of a subjectively enhanced depiction of nature. Horst Jösch's photo-works correspond to this artistic discourse. In lacking place and time as well as raising views of nature up to the abstract self-meaningfulness, the pictures of *La Serena II* resemble the thoughtful images of forests, seas and mountains of the *Trilogy* (*Woodland, Underwater, Mountain*) of the artist Daniel Gustav Cramer (born 1975). Some titles of exhibitions that this artist took part of – *Stille Landschaft* (Silent Landscape), *The Mystics* and *Broken Romanticism* – could also serve to describe the contemplative and romanticizing character of Horst Jösch's work. In the model-like visualization of natural forces an artistic analogy between *Against the Odds* and the series named *Forces* of Sonja Braas (born 1968) is apparent. She is a photo artist, who shows close ups of forces of nature and catastrophes, which only exist as models in the studio. The pictures of Horst Jösch are in a similar way conceptual; they as well question our notion of reality through fictitious picture-realities. Still they are more inspired by the romanticism of nature: They are "Landscape-Mental-Pictures" charged with metaphors.

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¹ Horst Jösch, *Artist Statement 2010*. Unpublished.

² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. Penguin Books Ltd. (UK) 2002, p. 52.

³ Cp. Martin Roman Deppner/Stefanie Heraeus/Bielefelder Kunstverein (ed.), *Out of the Camera. Analoge Fotografie im digitalen Zeitalter*. Heidelberg 2006. Artists who took part were Oliver Boberg, Miklos Gaál and Walter Niedermayr et al.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Rhetorik des Bildes* (1964), in: Bernd Stiegler (ed.), *Texte zur Theorie der Fotografie*. Stuttgart 2010, p. 87.

⁵ Press release accompanying the show: *Walter Niedermayr – fotografische Sequenzen*, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart 2004. Cp. <http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?action=termin&tid=1541> (as per May 2011).