

Hell

The exhibition *Hell* presents three new works by artist Marike Schuurman. In line with the rest of her work, they explore the ambiguity of human-made spaces and landscapes, as well as of the media of photography in which she works. While Schuurman's approach can be described as documentary – her subjects are usually bound to a certain location, often as curious phenomenons of this site-specific reality – the final images leave the realm of the documentary, moving towards a conceptual and sensory contemplation on what we see when we look at a photograph and what was there to begin with. In the exhibition *Hell*, although each work has its own intriguing background narrative, the images seem to have transformed almost wholly into a meditation on seeing and light – on the etymological meaning of photography as a writing, or drawing, with light.

This goes especially for the work *Schattendorf* [*Shadow Village*], which was realized in the North Italian village of Viganella. Presented in serial rows along two walls, it consists of 27 photographs, 27 variations on a huge mirror installed on the mountainside over this small Alpine town in 2006. Because of its position in a steep valley, Viganella lies completely in shadow in the winter, causing its former mayor to set up the 40 square meter, computer-operated mirror, that, by tracking the sun's path, now allows sunlight to be reflected onto the town's main square all year.

The photo *Blühender See* [*Blossoming Lake*] was taken at one of the former brown coal open-pit areas in Lausitz in the East of Germany. A whole district of decommissioned mines are here being transformed into strings of artificial lakes, in what will become the largest man-made water landscape in Europe. Due to a recording error, we see the tainted, scarred landscape from behind yellow light-like specks.

With *Expired*, on the other hand, the image hardly traces the world anymore. Taken with a Polaroid camera for which there are no new films any longer, Schuurman has used expired films to photograph her motives, resulting in unexpected reactions from within the device. The aged chemicals have run together and, by way of this breakdown, brought about new and surprising colour gradients instead. However, as inherent to its nature, even this film needs exposure to light to be able to function and produce images at all.

It is a paradox that the title of the exhibition, *Hell*, means bright in German, something brilliant and blinding which is traditionally associated with ideas of heaven and the godly, of eternal afterlife – whereas in English it means just the opposite: inferno, the netherworld. Concepts of light and shadow, life and death, in one word, as an epitome of photography itself. Every photograph contains the catastrophe of death, Barthes wrote about the medium and the way it attests to the transience of things. And Moholy-Nagy, in one of his early light poems: “Matter, space and time in contours of light, / in eternal light, light as the power that creates. / And insignificance / so conceitedly equated with time and space, / surrounds the darkness of man. / Only light, total light makes him complete.” Photography as creation through light; as an additional eye on the world that perceives things that our normal eye does not or cannot perceive. And as a witness of the passing of this shortly exposed world.

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