

Calling the representational character of the photographic image into question did not start with its digital storage. Manifold manipulations were already possible in the past. Thus apparitions of ghosts were suggested or politicians that had fallen from grace disappeared from official party photos. And a photographer continuously chooses, what to photograph and what he will not include in the image. What one does not see is perhaps more decisive than what one sees, and what appears to be present, simultaneously refers to its absence.

The multifaceted play with presence and absence, calculation and coincidence is the key characteristic of the photographs of all three artists represented in *SOS, presence of absence*.

Thus **Marike Schuurman**'s series *Automat* shows the interior of a booth, in which for a modest sum one could traditionally make passport photos and other photographs, which then after a certain amount of developing time would emerge from a slot. The artist took photographs using a polaroid camera – which corresponds to the technical process employed in the photo booths – of the swivel stools on which one sits for the photographs, at the various heights one needs to set according to one's body height to be in the image properly.

Marike Schuurman, however, does not show us the polaroid photographs, she has in fact bleached the negatives from which the photos are pulled off, and produced strongly enlarged photographs from these. Unlike in conventional negatives or digital files, neither grains nor pixels appear because the basis is solely a chemical emulsion. The image definition and distorted colour range automatically lends the photographs the appearance of having been made in the 1960's or 1970's. The look into the photo booth thus turns into a look into the photographic laboratory, into a reflection upon how the manufacturing process of a photo is more decisive than the motif itself.

This is also true of the series *Tiergarten* by **Johannes Schwartz**. We are often hardly able to identify the objects, which have been photographed like cut-outs. They are fruit boxes, pieces of meat, perhaps impressions from a farmer's market or a slaughterhouse? The title is the first reference to their not visible context, as what we see is the wild animal food the domesticated animals in the Moscow Zoo are fed. One

might call this a look behind the scenes the normal visitors of the zoo will not be provided with, which by painterly colour distortions is, however, faded out beyond recognition.

Even whilst coincidence is incorporated into the production of the prints, systematically prevailing technical standards of documentary photography nevertheless creep into Schwartz's images. These standards are met rather precisely by **Hester Oerlemans**, yet the photographed items fall out of line instead. For the exhibition *Link-o-loon* at the Kunstverein Diepenheim the artist recreated well-known designer chairs by Thonet, Eames or Mart Stam out of balloon material, but after 3-4 weeks the air had largely escaped. Hester Oerlemans' matter-of-fact objective photographs suggest a precise arrangement, but show the collapsed balloon objects exactly in the condition in which they were found, in which they happened to be. That these were once chair shapes is hardly recognisable any longer, if anything they elicit associations with medical equipment or crustaceans.

Even though the manipulation in this case does not directly concern the photographic image, its reproductive character is equally called into question. For decisive is not what the photo shows in actuality, but rather what it sparks in the viewers' minds.

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