

Lukas Hoffmann - „Reverberation“

2 - 30 September 2023, Opening: 1 September 2023, 6-8pm

The working instrument of artist Lukas Hoffmann (*1981 in Zug, lives in Berlin) is the camera, specifically the analog view camera, which guarantees a good resolving power. Methodically, he prefers a light wide-angle lens with a fixed focal length. This already sets some of the parameters that characterize the qualities and peculiarities of Hoffmann's photographs. To these belongs last but not least, since his beginnings, a focused choice of motifs: architectural buildings, infrastructures and peripheral zones bordering on nature and landscape.

With his choice of imaging technology and motifs, the artist moves in several ways within the history of photography since its beginnings. On one hand, he inscribes himself in the discussion about the indexical and iconic meaning of photography. The question is to what extent does a photograph, as a direct "light imprint" of an object, directly reproduce that said object, or to what extent does the image represent reality as a subjectively refracted reality, in the sense of a narrative realism. Here Hoffmann takes an exciting position, from which he pursues, among other things, a multi-layered treatment of time, light and shadow as compositional means.

Of the heroic and sublime landscapes of painting or the industrial landscapes in photography, all that remains in Hoffmann's work is a memory. Due to the great proximity to the motif in "Schönholz III", 2018, we look directly at a network of branches and a horizon line that divides the picture surface into two geometric halves. The transformational step that leads from an indexical to a more autonomous conception of the picture becomes even clearer in "EWZ Premnitz (Busch)", 2023. Here, nature is only the compositional material, while the image seems like a quotation of an all-over structure of abstract expressionism. Hence, it can already be seen here how the artist shifts photographic representation in favor of the autonomous image in his confrontation above all with American postwar painting - he himself names Clifford Still, Barnett Newman, or Jasper Johns, among others. As traces of reality, such as weathered surfaces, paint residues, or light reflections remain recognizable, the iconic aspect is also reflected and deliberately placed in an ambiguous relationship of tension with the autonomous image.

The optical theories and the competition that the new type of light image meant for painting in modernism both led to radical pictorial solutions up to abstraction and thus to the autonomous image. A side glance at Piet Mondrian and Paul Cézanne as pioneers of this development can be revealing. In both, the motif on the surface is transformed into the surface as motif. In the case of the former, to the point of geometric abstraction, while as the latter, Cézanne maintained the balance between reality and autonomous pictorial composition. Hoffmann succeeds in combining both strategies by choosing the motif sections in each case in such a way that the narrative context is largely hidden except for individual picture titles. Perceptually, image compositions inevitably emerge from geometric surfaces, which are often modulated in relief by precisely captured light and shadow. Photographs such as "Tauenziehenstrasse II", "EWZ Premnitz (Container)", "Quadrat", or "Hohenauen," all of which were taken between 2021 and 2023, thus virtually demand an abstract reading. Waiting for the right moment, and consequently the carefully chosen light and shadow casts - with which formal decisions such as spatial depth and plasticity are created - thus have a

central importance for Hoffmann in the working process. Equally important are the pictorial elements marked by irregular structures, often slightly weathered surfaces. All these factors make the actual subject of the picture recede behind the photographic composition in an impressive way, similar to abstract painting.

Through the photographic medium, we are generally confronted with a multi-layered concept of time. The exact moment, when the shutter release is pressed, cuts the continuum of time and usually lets us participate in a very specific moment through photography. Photography becomes the material for memory. This window of time never closes completely in Hoffmann's work, but it takes on a new meaning. The object of the picture remains his material, but in a certain sense he subjects it to a metamorphosis by focusing on its formal potential, as a means of composition.

It is becoming increasingly apparent how Hoffmann selectively and critically exploits the most diverse possibilities of photography in order to interpret it in a certain sense also as an autonomous image-generating medium. With his most recent work, the diptych "Wilhelmsaue, Berlin", 2023, he seems to be opening a new chapter in this regard. Once again, a sideways glance at art history reveals itself here. This time to minimalism and serial art, which has led to an ornamentalization of the surface, especially in painting. What is meant here is a creative process in which a familiar motif is repeated so often that it is emptied of its original meaning and seems to exist only as an abstract pictorial element in the formal organization of the picture. Jasper Johns, for example, has demonstrated this in his series of "Flags" with the American flag. In "Wilhelmsaue, Berlin", 2023, the beginnings of a further ornamentalization can be seen in that Hoffmann has not simply doubled the same negative, but has also mirrored it and rotated it by 180 degrees. Rotation and mirroring are also typical ornamental procedures. In Hoffmann's work, these steps lead on the one hand to the fact that the shadow cast accentuates the circular motif as a relief in different ways, thus giving it a certain independence. And because the motif is quite simply also a basic geometric form, the diptych is actually two "circles within a rectangle," Hoffmann comprehensibly demonstrates to us the possibility of perceiving the photographic image as an autonomous composition. It is no longer the story of a past event that is being told, but the story of the creation of an image. Last but not least, these images are quite simply images whose contemplation promises a high aesthetic pleasure.

August 2023, Elisabeth Gerber