

Tobias Zielony (1973, lives in Berlin) has for many years been photographing young people in their given environments, mainly in the public space. He is attracted to the fringe areas of urban reality: the banlieues of French metropolises, the cities of Saxony-Anhalt that have gained a reputation as shrinking cities, or the desert city Trona outside Los Angeles. In such places social tensions, the lack of alternatives and prospects are strongly in evidence.

The young people meet in car parks, shopping centres, service stations, or building entrances, which they transform into social places only through their presence. Even though people are the focus of the pictures, the architecture of the given localities also plays an important role. They shape Zielony's pictures just as much as the social relations between the people living there: the urban surroundings intensify the sense of boredom and tristesse. They are places you feel you have seen before. At the same time, the chosen scenes seem surreal, as if they were abandoned film sets. Now they function as stages on which the young people present themselves.

Thanks to global advertising, music videos, films, and Internet portals like MySpace, their postures, facial expressions, clothing, and accessories speak the same language whether they live in Marseilles, Bristol, or Halle Neustadt. They move with great self-assurance before the camera, always intent on projecting a certain image of themselves. But the presence of the photographer is really no longer necessary. Whether anyone is observing them or not, their whole lives are one long pose, as if they were on a permanent casting show. As if the promise the future holds is to be discovered so that life can finally begin. Until then they are in a state of wait-and-see. It is this transitional situation that Zielony's pictures capture at various levels: adolescents in puberty, between childhood and adulthood; between stagnation and hope; intensified by the mixed light of dawn and dusk when many of the photos were shot.

Zielony works only with the light available, without flash or artificial light. Street lights, the sidelights of parked cars, or lighted windows create a singular atmosphere that characterises the place just as much as the architecture. His photos are in the tradition of the picture story, something between intimate proximity and observing distance. His intention is not to moralise or instruct; he is interested in this "completely casual form of social life" that is apparent in the young people's hanging about. From the point of view of the classical news media they convey no interesting story. The story playing in the background is too quiet, too inconspicuous.

In contrast to classical documentations, his pictures exceed the boundaries of artistic work. He juxtaposes various genres, such as individual portraits, group pictures, detailed views, landscape and

architectural pictures, and action photos, developing a form of narration similar to that found in films.

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