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Paul Kolling

Nadir

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Press release

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In his works, Paul Kolling deals with current issues of economy, ecology, and the development of complex infrastructures over the past two centuries. For his solo exhibition *Nadir*, Kolling has conceived a new work that examines the history of aerial photography and the Hansa Luftbild GmbH. The development of so-called aerophotogrammetry a little over a hundred years ago led to a change in perspective from the horizontal to the vertical and required a completely new way of “reading” images. The artist traces this new or rather shifted perspective on the environment and the resulting change in the perception of space and of the self.

By using technical systems and self-written code, Kolling creates installations, sculptures, and videos that move between analog and digital space. His research-based works complicate conventional notions of recording and classifying space, confronting the viewer with the act of observing as a process governed by interests. For the Munich exhibition, the so-called “Luftbild-Lesebücher” (aerial photo readers), published by the Hansa Luftbild from the 1920s onwards, serve as a point of departure. They contain instructional and educational images as well as topological analyses, providing a socio-ideological framework for a development that was initially motivated purely by military objectives. Since the First World War, aerial photographs have been a key element of both military reconnaissance and civilian aerial surveying. Through the two-dimensional and rasterized visualization of territory, knowledge of the earth’s surface increasingly became systematic knowledge of what was hidden beneath—from archaeological artifacts and natural resources to troops hidden in forests. Accordingly, photography played a central role in the technical constitution of the military gaze as well as the allocation of national and property boundaries.

In his new work of the same name as the exhibition, Kolling exposes these complex socio-political and economic relationships. The film projection shows an approximate reconstruction of a flight route by the Hansa Luftbild and is screened using a modified projector and embedded in an expansive intervention that constricts the proportions of the exhibition spaces.

In *Nadir*, Kolling addresses the (im)possibility of documenting the world: views of the actual places are subjected to a reductive abstraction in order to depict the complexity of the world in a two-dimensional image. This loophole built into the photographic method is at the center of the Munich exhibition. The ability to read or, more precisely, the “literacy” of such images still shapes our view of/on the world today.