

Kathrin Sonntag

These Boots Aren't Made For Walking

31.3.–13.5.23

„In the end, I want to create situations with my works that change or also expand perceptions.”

In her new exhibition, “These Boots Aren't Made for Walking,” Kathrin Sonntag explores the ways in which everyday objects influence our perception and the meaning attributed to them. With systematic thoroughness and playful ease, her photographs, objects and arrangements reveal the conditions of perception and cognition, creating a space in which our relationship to things and the objects' relationships to one another emerges.

“We are surrounded by objects. They constitute our environment and form reliable constants in our perception of the world. As the title suggests, the exhibition “These Boots Aren't Made for Walking” is about objects that refuse this service in different ways. The exhibition deals with unruly things: Things that look like other things, that suddenly take on a life of their own, that drop out of the background and challenge our usual attributions of meaning through confusing similarities and affinities of form.”

The exhibition starts with a long table, which was set by Kathrin Sonntag for “Say Cheese!” (2023). The table becomes a stage for whimsical objects: On a tablecloth bearing the image of a brick wall as a pattern, the artist places candles in the shape of stones and cream puffs, a watermelon that serves as a knife block, a peeler in the shape of an asparagus, and similar curiosities. Many objects are collected, others made by the artist herself. The set table in the gallery space combines the pictorial traditions of still life with 17th-century tromp l'oeil, countering the modernist doctrine of „form follows function“ that so often accompanies reductive design with a strange world of things in which the shape of an object sometimes announces its use, sometimes is merely decorative, and sometimes seems to be deliberately deceptive.



Dinge im Hintergrund #3, 2022

Inkjet Print, framed behind museums glass
110 x 73 cm

Perception, deception, and the question “to what extent can I trust my eyes?” are also crucial to the photographic works in the exhibition. Sonntag's series “Objects in the Background“ (2022-2023) uses the play with forms and appearance to investigate the core paradox of photography: as a medium, it is simultaneously able to depict an “objective reality“ and, on the other hand, to create manipulated images of reality. Sonntag's doubling of the photographic process offers the basis for reflections on one's own seeing. The artist skillfully places three-dimensional objects on two-dimensional photographic prints that, when photographed again, at first glance become part of the image. However, upon closer inspection inconsistencies emerge. The attempt to see through this enigmatic pictorial structure thus throws the viewer back on his or her own perception. How we see and what we see are thereby shown to be inherently linked.

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The moment our attempt to understand things in themselves gives way to a view of how objects relate to one another, things lose their fixed meaning and float in a state of ambivalence. The objects increasingly develop a life of their own and seem to communicate with each other. A copper bucket stands tensely in the corner of the room. It has feet reminiscent of lion paws and is placed by Sonntag on a large stone in such a way that we are reminded of taxidermized animals in museums whose original habitat is merely suggested in the display. In an astonishing way, Sonntag's "Objekt" (2022) appears more animated than many a dusty taxidermy.

Like the bucket, a five-legged bench, which is part of "o.T. (bench & pipes)" (2023) is characterized by a certain creatureliness. The artist has added curved legs to a piece of furniture with clean rectangular lines, the feet of which are designed to resemble paws. The slightly offset fifth leg of the bench reinforces the impression of movement and of the fact that it is a morphing creature. The wallpaper behind the bench shows three oversized pipe blanks stacked on top of each other, their unfinished state giving them sculptural qualities. The bench and pipes form a visual rhyme based on their materiality and form, creating the impression of a kinship between the objects.

In a publication that is part of the exhibition, Sonntag further tests our tendency to ascribe agency to objects. By combining her own photographs of objects with found ones, she creates situations that seem to have an inherent narrative. Do objects think like us? Do they interact with each other? And is there any way for us to access the world of things?



Dinge im Hintergrund #2, 2022

Inkjet Print, framed behind museums glass
110 x 73 cm

Biographical Note:

Kathrin Sonntag, born 1981, belongs to the emerging international positions of young photography, treating the medium in a new way. Works by Kathrin Sonntag have been on view in internationally acclaimed exhibitions including "Photo Poetics: An Anthology", Guggenheim Museum New York, and "RAY" Fotografie Projekte, Fotografie Forum Frankfurt am Main. She has shown photo projects at the Aspen Art Museum, Kunstverein Hamburg, the Swiss Institute New York, and Schaustelle der Pinakothek der Moderne Munich. Her works are included in the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Pinakothek der Moderne Munich, among others. In 2021 a comprehensive solo exhibition "ICHDUERSIEESWIRIHRISIE" took place at the Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Switzerland.

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