

For his second solo show at Société Berlin, Kaspar Müller presents 28 collages of photographs mounted on cardboard entitled "The Weather in Zürich", 2013–2014. Size: 100 x 75 cm, each.

*Hey, Kaspar.*

*So, to get started, should we talk about travel or about circulation?*

When it comes to these images of Lake Zürich, it's mainly a matter of place. A very specific place. When you see the images, you won't be in the same place, because they were all taken in Zürich, and the exhibition of the photos is in Berlin. So you would have to travel, even just in your imagination, to a specific destination. It's not that much about traveling in general, but about one place, which might include traveling as a way of getting there – but then, that place has in a way traveled to Berlin. The lake is portrayed in a number photographs, unique moments captured over a year, over 4 seasons, in different weather conditions.

What might follow could be called traveling, maybe, on a metaphoric level at least. Like memories don't arise until they've been reflected by something, mostly something superficial, like a texture, a picture, a sound, an object, or a scent. I want to use the lake and the pictures first of all as a vehicle. Whether something breaks or reflects on it or just runs into emptiness and oblivion. At first glance, these works have a potential that could be compared to that of postcards.

*Could you say something about these photos, which you're calling *The Weather in Zürich* – in relation to the works you've done in the past about a hat?*

I've done three projects with the hat: It started as a costume for an actor in my film about a specific place, or rather two places, edited together into one ideal place: *Colmar & Strasbourg*. There's a strong parallel to the idea of the *mise-en-scène* of an existing place, to use it as a ready-made stage, not just with the facades but also to avail oneself of its "image" and reputation – though the lake is an 'empty' stage, a stage for the landscape first and foremost. In my photos of Lake Zürich, there is no narrator, no guide measuring and mediating the place, like there is with the actor in the film *Colmar & Strasbourg*.

The protagonist is the lake itself. Also, the photos are static, captured moments, nothing moves. In the film, motion is very important – not just as the medium, but also the very slow flow of the actor (with the hat) on the ships through the canals of Colmar and of Strasbourg, passing by the facades of buildings. Lake Zürich seems immobile, heavy. The rivers in Colmar and Strasbourg never stay put,

the water passes into the sea somewhere in Holland. Lake Zürich is a basin, it stands still. The actor was wandering through places of conserved and mediated memories and historicized education, instructed by audio-guides, through a self-inflicted and vain mock Atlantis, lost in debates and self-portrayal, feeding from the past, almost like a facade built after its own cliché. It's also a different way to recollect something when it's mediated. The big, eye-catching hat had its origin in a promotional hat from Heineken, which I re-tailored with different fabrics. It made the actor look like a drop-out magician hippie lost in a touristy stage of colorful trippy half-timbered facades. The actor was constantly walking, or the ships were moving, so there was never a still moment.

While the touristic facades in Colmar and Strasbourg look damned, rotten, a civilization falling apart, almost without any nature, the lake looks like a utopian place, a treasure island, a safe heaven where nature and civilization have developed a symbiotic relation. The trees on the hills around the lake in Zürich have been cultivated so that one can't see beyond the city, can't see the rest of the world behind the green edges. A cultivated utopia. Zürich is a very strong and powerful place and, compared to many of the other places I've been, it still seems like an exotic place.

The lake is so clean, it's actually classified as drinking water. The lake also has a symbolic value, of course, a basin contains things under its reflecting surface that can't be seen. Which is also a fact. It's like a mirror in which you search for deeper things, but you just reflect yourself. In this case, the whole landscape/sky is reflected. As for the images, they're often divided by a horizontal line, almost mirroring that scene.

*Hm ... reflecting, mirror, reflect, reflected, mirroring ... Even if that mirrored surface is impenetrable, what might people read into the simple fact of it?*

As you say, one will want to read something into it, force it even, because it's not acceptable for it to stop there, like with the image of a postcard that I mentioned before. Also, these images seem so very known from the point of view of a collective memory. Only very hard-boiled reception would leave it there. And I could only imagine Kleist or Poe finishing a story that would conclude with the simple fact of a reflection, and even then it would feed from the disappointment and tragedy because more was expected. Actually, I'm not averse to this. But before I come back to the mirroring, I want to mention the weather, which is very important for the images, also given the fact that it's reflected on the surface of the water. The weather is a very strong influence on the atmosphere and the ambience, and it expresses that on the lake in particular. I paid a lot of attention to the weather. In the time I took the pictures, I captured very different weather conditions. Almost like in the German Romantic period, landscape and weather are inseparable. And it can bring out

memories and thoughts with a bit of help from drama.

But one might assume there must be a dark potential. Or a twin potential. That there must be another side. If not, the rejection of any depth would almost amount to aggression.

Whenever one talks about Switzerland's dark side, that's when its landscape shines the brightest. It seems almost to express it in that way because it demands an equilibrium. I just read a text from Jean-Luc Godard about the Swiss landscape. He says that as the Swiss people have internalized the disreputable character of their country in relation to certain issues from the past and present, that has been turned outside again. It's the law of the *équilibre*. The landscape is there to clean that debt, and Godard assumes that Swiss artists and filmmakers always see and portray the landscape with a bad conscience. He of course films it, though, because it's beautiful.

*What kinds of changes do you think occur when you combine images in the form of a grid (even if it's just two images, or an uneven grid)?*

It's definitely an uneven grid. These are handmade, rough collages. I mounted the photos on sheets of cardboard that I painted with wall paint first. With all these horizontal lines from the lake, it's almost like adding up, stacking up. Normally, when you bring two images together, it's a confrontation, which can lead to harmony or conflict. But because the horizontal line is so strong and there are so many photos of the same topic, I think the gesture leads more to an addition than to a confrontation. When you look up images of Lake Zürich on the Internet, you'll find many pictures that look similar. So I've added my photos to a huge amount of already existing photos of the lake. They build first and foremost a visual collective memory. Be it from flickr, Google, social media or printed magazines. So with these images, it also begins to add up. We can only guess how the collective memory of an actual visit in Zürich could be like. And I wonder how diverse that would be. I always liked the idea of using lists (making lists) as a means of comparing things. A list, at least as long as it doesn't have a purpose, is always complete, whether one takes something out or adds something. With the grid and the amount of photos spread in the space, the focus in the comparison lies more in the differences than in the similarities. But after a certain number of pictures of the lake – after yet another image – the viewer probably begins to feel indifferent about it. I want to push the images and, through that, to push the place into a beautiful redundancy and oblivion. So, the dark side could be oblivion.

... to be continued ...

Conversation between John Beeson und Kaspar Müller

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