

In contrast to any type of image production that aims above all to achieve optimized effect in the digital media, Annette Kelm unleashes the potential inherent in photography to reproduce the world of objects and thereby uncover their cultural foundations and day-to-day aporias or impasses.

On the one hand, her photographs seem dedicated to a thoroughly sober presentation of things, quoting genres such as the still life and studio photography. On the other hand, however, her strictly formal pictorial language with its neutral light and objective view of arranged objects gives the latter a hyper-real presence, freeing them from the realm of the purely factual. Levelled down onto the plane surface and free of any narrative charge, the compositional factor comes to the fore, endowing the motifs in all their visual density and pithiness with an almost rebus-like significance. Thus the things are what they are, yet carry also an abstract significance that is merely ascribed to them. They are straightforward and yet at the same time intractable motifs that seem to fit neither the category of objective documentation nor that of figurative representation. They flatten objects pictorially into a plane or line them up in the lines and sequences of photographic experiments and lighting effects. Depicted frequently from the front and with great sharpness of detail, the minimal yet ornament-oriented world of things marks the translation into the twodimensional space of photography. The latter's perspective, narrowing into a single point of view, is part of the photographic apparatus, but also the expression of a subjective vision of the world.

Thus in the three-part series *Monney* (2015), arranged as a triptych, unused onedollar bills can be seen against a background of packing paper. In the first picture, they form the wrongly spelt word 'Monney', while in the two other pictures this disintegrates into a heap of banknotes. The notes, whose photographic reproduction precludes any test of their genuineness, present themselves as printed paper, possessing here at best an abstract monetary value. Money and language alike present themselves rather as the result of a symbolically regulated, societally practiced consensus.

In the likewise three-part series *Money Tree* (2015), the dollar bills serve as the leaves of decorative plants and form an abstract tree of money. The individual titles, however, record the given arrangement in the style of a protocol: *One Dollar Right Side / Money Tree One Leaf Right* or *One Dollar Left Side / Money Tree One Leaf Left*. On some of the bills, Kelm has painted the corners of George Washington's mouth turned upwards.

All the objects on view in these photographs are of little value. They are things bought in one-Euro thrift shops or things found on the street – pizza boxes or flowers against a coloured-paper background reminiscent of Mondrian. The way they are staged has no ennobling effect, but neither does it simply let the things drift away from reality into spheres of cultural meaning. Grounded in

the principle of repetition and variation, the pictures centering on these objects tend rather to emphasize the photographic itself as the production of signs and images. Seriality reveals itself as a way out of a pictorial concept trapped in representation. Based on a complex serial strategy, Annette Kelm's photography is hypostasized in endlessly differentiated repetitions. *Balancing Wedge* shows the identical, clearly personally constructed set of scales in a range of differing inclinations or tilts. The photograph of a pizza box on which an expressively shaped piece of bark is lying contrasts the standard, industrial product with the natural *objet trouvé*, but only in its differing versions does it become an enigmatic image of photography as a system of signs. The portrait of the artist Lucie Stahl, showing her standing behind a red blind, is as much formal composition as a study of propinquity and distance, image and simulacrum.

The jeans shirt on which a cup painted with a face has been positioned – all photographed against a gleaming yellow background – could be a self-portrait of the artist. The Jacquard loom with its punch-card system is a forerunner of the binary system in modern computers. As these images make clear, however, instrumentality is just one and probably not even the most important category in our dealings with things, which are always also place-holders for something else, something other.

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