

In a world of rapid consumption and ubiquitous circulation of images, the work of the Japanese artist Wataru Murakami is formed in a media- and content-wise decelerated manner. He began working on his *Still Life* project during his residency in Karlsruhe, Germany. So far, 18 booklets have been self-published with each categorized thematically and arranged with the artist's photographs as work in progress. After several exhibition adaptations from parts of the series, Murakami produced an installative arrangement for the Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart, Germany) based on *Still Life #18*, in which some photographs from earlier booklets are also taken up again. The color concept developed for the presentation is derived from the chromaticism of individual motifs: large-format and monochrome wall surfaces concentrate our attention on individual image constellations and at the same time connect the exhibition spaces to form a visual unit.

The exhibition *Fit In – In Between* focuses on the relationship between the subject and society. Produced as a reflection on the tradition of still life that goes back to antiquity, the group of *Still Life* works forces an examination of the aesthetic imprints of identity concepts. This theme is closely linked to the biographical background of Wataru Murakami: raised in Japan, Canada and the USA, he has been influenced by Japanese and Western culture since his childhood. Today he lives and works in Berlin (Germany), Karlsruhe (Germany) and Tokyo (Japan). However, the concepts of *Fit In* and *In Between* also apply to every individual, regardless of their biography. We all realize our formation of the ego by interweaving socially and culturally, by integrating and delimiting ourselves. The importance of the aesthetic dimension has been described in various subject theories. We claim our place in the world visually and pictorially: from passport photos to Instagram stories, from designs of private furnishings to urban planning. We negotiate our “fitting” into society about the visibility and iconicity of our self and our environment, our socio-cultural fit-in. The “subject cultures of modernity (...) prove to be hybrid arrangements of historically disparate set pieces,” according to Andreas Reckwitz. “Modernity does not produce an unambiguous, homogeneous subject structure; rather, it provides a field for the confrontation with cultural differences regarding what the subject is and how it can form itself. The characteristic of modernity is that it does not give the subject a definitive form, but rather it opens this up as a contingency problem, an open question to which constantly new and different cultural answers are given and put into practice.” In globalized and transcultural societies, this field of confrontation is expanding more and more, and is increasingly becoming the object of reference and negotiation in the field of art.

In the dialectics of a participating outside observer, Wataru Murakami unfolds a visual spectrum of the *In Between* in *Still Life #18*. The motifs and modes of representation could hardly be more diverse: object photographs (which quote a commercial style but are in fact bodiless portraits of

people), architectural and urban views (as socially formative environments, which are culturally preformed and reshaped), portraits (of people who unite aspects of different cultures), still lifes of fruit (as set pieces of a traditional Western imagery genre), photographs of museum depots (as stores of (natural) history and its interpretation), working situations (in Murakami's mobile studio and a fish factory in the city of Himi, Japan), or the recurring depiction of the artist putting on his shoes.

How do these images fit together? In a certain way, all these visual arrangements follow the same cultural concepts: whether the works are either constructed image-in-image still lifes with the belongings of different photographers, staged working situations with stencil-like images or the cityscapes of Karl-Marx-Allee in Berlin and the Potsdam City Palace. All these different cultural manifestations can be grasped as spatial arrangements, as the arrangement(s) of objects. The term "arrangement" not only has a spatial meaning, but also a temporal validity in the sense of an agreement. This temporal aspect appears in obsolete significance and further usage and transformation of the historical architectural styles. In the exhibition, Murakami reflects on these processes by, among other things, inserting a photograph of the magnificent building rebuilt in 2010 into a baroque picture frame from the original Potsdam City Palace. History and its visual manifestations thus overlap and shift their meanings.

The urban views and the staged object photographs can also be understood as stage-like situations. A stage functions as a spatial presentation and is also known for its inconstancy, its staging structures, its playfulness with reality and the backstage behind it. Staging also takes place on a scene within a limited time. The photograph of Murakami's artist colleague Robert Hamacher seems like a documentation-shot of a performance. In an almost dance-like pose he throws a piece of clothing over himself. This attempt to slip in all those clothes will not succeed – at least not in a usual way. On the other hand, the performance of putting a pair of shoes on, in which the images repeatedly appear like a refrain in the booklet *Still Life #18* and are installed on the floor, leaned against the walls in the exhibition, does succeed. Both actions stand almost symbolically for the processes of *Fit in* and the state of uncertainty of an *In Between*, in which we dispute our everyday lives. Understood as culturally effective concepts, the terms "arrangement", "stage" and "performance" provide starting points for the inherent logic of the *Still Life* project. This logic of the project is based on a reference to the art history tradition of still life. Individual motifs take up the aesthetic schemata of still life and play with its content and symbolic meanings.

The booklet *Still Life #18* is interlarded with quotations from the art history about representations of inanimate objects. But no seamless narrative is generated from these set pieces. The still life serves more as a blueprint to play with traditional cultural forms in an artistic way and to initiate a visual

investigation of the interrelation of normative image and subject cultures. Each individual photograph raises the question of how cultural formations are socially negotiated and how subjects are constituted. With that in mind, working on images is the same as working about life. The medium of photography offers the possibility of generating images that provide both general, supra-individual points of contact, but also at the same time, a coding can be woven into them that is based on the artist's individual gaze. The individual photographs stand in a modular relationship to each other, their constellation is in a non-fixed order that is expanded, supplemented, adapted and modified according to the respective exhibition situation. With its tentative interest in the interrelation of cultural and subject formation, *Still Life* displays an almost (socio-)psychographic character.

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1 Andreas Reckwitz, *Das hybride Subjekt. Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne*, Weilerswist 2006, p. 20 and p. 14.

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