Kaspar Müller, Schätze der Erinnerung
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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, of course. When you see the images in the show, you won’t be in the same place, because they were all taken in Zürich, and the exhibition of the photos is in Berlin. The lake is portrayed in a number photographs, unique moments captured over the course of more than a year, over four seasons, in different weather conditions. I was walking around the lake, but I wouldn’t call that traveling. I was walking in circles, and always returned to the same point. The show is called Schätze der Erinnerung, meaning “Treasures of Memory”. Memories don’t
include traveling on a metaphorical level. I want to use the lake and the pictures first of all as a vehicle. At first glance, these works have a potential that could be compared to that of postcards. It also makes a big difference whether you’re familiar with the motif or the place, either through a real experience or as an idea—though these photographs tend to create disconnect by preventing viewers from connecting with either the place or the author.

What about the form of the work?
a nice inversion. I like that idea because I understand the word as being French for “anything goes”. Of course, the photographs are the most important part. But the cardboard isn’t just a background; it’s what makes each piece an object. I used three different digital cameras in taking all these photos, so the white cardboard is also an imitation of the white field you see when laying something out on the computer—when placing and moving the digital picture around on a blank virtual format. For me, it was important that these pictures be taken digitally and stored in a folder on my hard drive. There is no natural connection to the prints. It’s a translation.
Therefore,

I wanted high-gloss photo paper, to reference ‘photographs’ from the darkroom. I think it’s pretty obvious that these aren’t real prints, they’re just inkjet prints on glossy paper, imitating the now retro value of the material of real photos. Other older pictures of the lake that also look just like mine exist as ‘real prints’ in thousands of dusty old photo albums, not just in digital form on the web. No one takes the time to scan them, to digitalize them.

Analogue photography became a source of nostalgia characterized by the fetish of purity, chemistry, and materialism. But the analogue image is still what we think of when we think of a photograph. That’s what most digital photos imitate when they’re printed. My handling of the photos and the cardboards as transformed...
material is
direct and
transparent.
I didn’t want to mount the print-
ed photographs, but rather glue
them like a piece of paper.
Sometimes they became quite
warped in the process. It’s not affectionate,
nor is it loveless. Maybe it’s honest about
its own rhetorical lies. I spent a lot of time
taking these digital pictures, and after
that, collecting and sorting them in folders
on my desktop. The process of materializ-
ing the digital original was quick. I printed
them out and glued them onto these piec-
es of cardboard, which I’d painted first
with white wall paint. After that, I nailed
each piece of cardboard directly to
the wall and painted over the nail heads
with wall paint. The pressure you feel
when using a digital camera, that you
might take a bad picture, is very minimal.
You can just delete it if it looks bad on the
display.

Since smartphones now have great cameras too, taking pictures isn’t even worth a thought. You just do it. Even if it’s not necessary, it couldn’t hurt. With this project, I was interested in an inflationary practice. I like how everyone is constantly taking pictures, and since these pictures often end up on social media, you can see that the motifs are usually very similar. There’s nothing more specific and at the same time more generic than the lake in the richest and, at the moment, most expensive city in the world. It’s a specific localization and a picture of a lake.

Could you say something about these photos, which you’re calling The Weather in Zürich—in relation to the film you’ve done in the past about Colmar and Strasbourg?
There’s a parallel in terms of the idea of the mise-en-scène of an existing place—using it as a readymade stage, not just in terms of the facades, but also to avail oneself of its ‘image’ and the reputation of the place. But, as a stage, the lake is an ‘empty’ stage, a stage for the landscape first and foremost. In the photos of Lake Zürich, there is no narrator or guide measuring and mediating the place, as there is with the actor in the film *Colmar & Strasbourg*. The protagonist is the lake itself, a piece of nature in the center of a highly developed civilization. Also, the photos are static, captured moments; nothing moves. In the film, motion is very important—not just as the medium, but also given the very slow flow of the actor on ships through the canals of Colmar and 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 recollection and historicized education, instructed by audio guides, through a vain mock Atlantis, almost like a facade built after its own cliché. A touristy stage of colorful, trippy, half-timbered facades.

Whereas the touristic facades in Colmar and Strasbourg look damned and without real signs of life, the lake looks like a utopian place, a treasure island, a safe heaven where nature and civilization have developed a symbiotic relation. I know the trees on the hills around the lake in Zürich are being cultivated so that you
can’t see beyond the city, can’t see the rest of the world beyond the green fringe. 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, as a basin that contains things under its reflecting surface that can’t be seen. Thinking about the complacency of these images, it’s nice that the landscape and the sky are reflected on the surface of the lake. They’re often divided by a horizontal line, almost mirroring that scene. Divided mainly into parts: the lake, the hilly horizon, and the sky.
As you say, people will want to read something into it, even force some interpretation, because it's unacceptable for it to stop there. Only very hard-boiled reception would leave it there. The lake, for one thing, like a mirror, might stand for a desire. But the photos separate rather than connect spectator and author. It's a ritual of severance, not cohesion. 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. I paid a lot of attention to the weather. I tried to capture very different weather conditions. Almost like in the German Romantic
period, landscape and weather are inseparable. When you look at these pretty pictures, you 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 an interview where Jean-Luc Godard talks about the Swiss landscape. He says that as the Swiss people have come to internalize 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)?

With all these horizontal lines from the lake, it's like adding up, stacking up. Normally, when you bring two images together, it's a confrontation. But because the horizontal line is so strong and there are so many photos of the same subject, 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 a lot of pictures that look similar. So I’ve added my photos to a huge number of already existing photos of the lake. They contribute to or follow a visual collective memory. Be it via flickr, Google, social media, or printed magazines. So with these images, it also begins to add up. We can only guess what the collective memory of an actual visit to Zürich would 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 is always complete, regardless of whether you take something out or add 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, which is funny, because at first glance it all looks more or less
‘the same’.

And after a certain number of pictures of the lake—after yet another image—the viewer probably begins to feel indifferent about it. It tends toward a beautiful redundancy and oblivion. So, maybe the dark side could be oblivion.
as well as a destination. Looking out onto the surface of the water functions as a form of orientation, or as an illusion. The world doesn't end on a horizontal line but follows the revolution of our planet. The image of a body of water is also a pretty good metaphor for the simulacrum that is an object of art. It can be made to fit any form, and it defines the container which makes up its outside to the same extent that it is represented by its full materiality. It is defined as much by itself as by where it sits. Considering that we are probably moving on foot, these pictures also represent a barricade, a limitation of sorts. The point where we are standing—
as these pictures suggest—
could be thought of as the margin of the body that makes up Lake Zürich; in return, it partially marks the margin of the body that is the city of Zürich. Looking at these pictures, we become aware of ourselves in an exhibition space. We look at these images while the objects that make them up look back at us. This creates a reversed situation: where we become the point of direction as well as a destination. The lake looks back at us; the way we move (through the exhibition) becomes an orientation; this may emphasize the experience—of reality as whole—of an illusion. If these images of Lake Zürich make up the initial simulacrum, then in return, we are Lake Zürich to this simulacrum. This two-way street would soon drown in boredom, but the artist relieves
glued to pieces of white-painted card-
board, which effectively act as canvases. 
The actual effect is a simulation of moving 
images—time, basically. Considering the 
title of the exhibition, Schätze der 
Erinnerung, these points in time—Lake 
Zürich in every season—suggest a relative 
simultaneity of (indeed, boring) events. 

The treasure doesn’t lie in the past. 
Memory is a contemporary experience. 
Motion is not suggested as a linear 
phenomena. It is paradoxically simulated 
as one incident. This makes us the ‘inertial 
frame of reference’. In the sense of that 
term, which comes from physics, we are in 
a state of constant rectilinear motion with 

us with 
a simple trick. 
Many of the 
pictures of Lake Zürich have 
been paired or grouped with 
other pictures of Lake Zürich, 
and all of them have been
It may seem coquettish, in light of that, to place an image of a—supposedly still—kinetic sculpture by Jean Tinguely among these pictures of Lake Zürich.
In the exhibition, the works were pretty much evenly spaced along the walls of the gallery’s four rooms.

Yes.

Could you say something about that?

I was thinking to create a cycle, but also to highlight the single prints as photographs, with some amount of affection for the details.

The hanging also stressed what they had in common through rigorous, obvious repetition.

It wasn’t entirely an obsession with the lake yet, though it had the potential to tilt at windmills, to chase after something that maybe wasn’t there.
The ambition was so undeveloped that the evenly spread hanging indicated complacence rather than obsession—as a St. Petersburg hanging could, for example. As it was, though the gallery is a pretty big space, some of the works from the series didn’t make it into the show. It was never intended to be final. For the exhibition, I wanted the viewer to be surrounded by the lake at eye level. Wherever you looked, you saw the water stretch into the distance until it met the opposite shore and the beginning of the horizon. Standing in the gallery was like standing on an island in the middle of the lake. What connects all the photos formally is the horizontal line of the shore—regardless of whether it connects them like an interrupted line, or whether two photos are stacked on top of one
from one part of the lake to another. Maybe just to pick up where Tenzing left off: These photographs of Lake Zürich also, at times, depict boats and birds and houses. Yes, thats true. It's not an abandoned place. It's not post-apocalyptic. It's just set up very quiet and empty, spacious, naturally—with the lake's blank surface in the lower part of almost every picture. But there aren't really any people. It was as important to hide some subjects against the cardboard backing. And, as Tenzing wrote, the lake was a form of orientation. As you walked from room to room, you went another against the cardboard backing.
as it was
to point some out. A lot of things have been hidden, left out, left unrecognizable. There are no people that are more than what could be called ‘population’ or ‘statistics’. There’s a man fishing; he’s ‘a fisherman’. The houses stand for ‘civilization’. Obviously, people live there. And though they might sometimes look like models, it’s pretty clear that they aren’t models in miniature. I think it’s always clear that there is life, and there are many signs of it. There are many birds in the pictures; they indicate a healthy, livable environment. But the birds aren’t the inhabitants of the place.

How did you decide what to show versus what not to show?

Like with the birds, it was about finding a
I wanted. Sometimes I was surprised by what I got, but rarely. As I said, I used three different digital cameras, for aesthetic reasons, but also because that way, you take too many pictures anyway. But still I tried to set limits. I tried to balance the photos out as much as possible when I took the pictures, and by balance I mean keeping them in balance for the sake of balance. You could say that balance is the root of evil, or at least boredom, but I think it's not only important, it's very intense. Because so many forces act on it. And I think that the mediocre, the average, the balanced—that's a really interesting subject for art, both aesthetically

balance in relation to several other details. But the process started when I took the pictures, so later it was just to chose which one got closest to what
and conceptually in relation to contemporary culture. After over a year of walking in circles around the lake with a camera in hand, I had more than enough pictures to choose from, and there are plenty of other pictures that I could have just printed out and added. It was a process of allowing more than choosing.

_Do you think the work exhibits some kind of restraint in the end?_ A restraint concerning art and the artist, maybe. And as an idea, it's also a bit of a cul-de-sac. Tenzing was right when he wrote that the lake is also a form of limitation—not just when thinking of the photographer as a pedestrian walking around the edge of the lake. Of course, if you don't want to swim out into the...
lake, that’s a kind of physical limitation. Although there are boats that can cross the lake, they stay in the water and don’t dive below the surface. In the case of Lake Zürich, these boats are constantly measuring the lake again and again in the name of leisure. They cruise around—not to travel from A to B—since all of these boats return to their starting point, the harbor or village or city where they started. That’s a nice metaphor for the work and the oblivion that I talked about in the first part of our conversation. Oblivion doesn’t necessarily imply standstill. It rather implies continuous motion, movement toward a zero point, the process of squaring a circle.

Could you maybe say something about the exhibition’s title, Schätze der Erinnerung?
Those images made it onto the Internet, so you can find them on Google or in other image databanks. Certain views of the lake are closely linked to tourism and the way the city is represented in advertisements. In a way, I just added more of the same. The subject, the lake, isn’t physically worn down by that process. In the photographs, there aren’t specific elements that could evoke a personal connection to whoever took the photograph—in this case, to me, to the memory I have of being there and taking the pictures. There isn’t a single picture where something is happening that could be a shared experience between the viewer and photographer. It’s

These photographs might connect to the memory of other images, images that have been taken around the lake by innumerable people over the years. Many of
interventions and cultivation. There’s no chance of finding memories in these pictures in the same way that David Hemmings’s character in Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* found something in a photograph. In any case, I don’t think you can see the ‘crime’. Crime is a part of any world. But these photographs don’t take responsibility for anything. After all, why should memories contain treasures—whether they’re memories of happiness, or horror, or are just insignificant? When I was in the exhibition with people after the show had opened, they definitely had different memories of the place. Some had been to Zürich before, some have never been,
others
had only seen pictures,
and some had actually spent part of their youth there and had very specific memories connected to certain places

pictured. But the photos always remain alien. For me too. I have memories of things that aren’t depicted in the pictures, because I was there taking the photos. I think that’s important: the memory of the photographer who took the pictures. It’s not there. The images are cut off from everything that I did before or after taking them, from what happened to the left of me, to the right of me, and behind me. From the walk there, the people, the atmosphere, all the things that can’t be found in the photos. I think memory is more about what isn’t shown. As I told you once about the really kitschy photo with the pink sunset and the boat calmly
anchored:
I took it on a mid-summer evening, and behind me there were thousands of people laughing, singing, playing music, drinking, smoking. You can’t see that, and that’s very powerful. The way that the camera imposes limitations is also the source of photography’s potential. As the saying goes: What the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve over. Only the Internet pretends that you can see everything if you just look it up. But I don’t want to squeeze too much out of these images—or rather, squeeze too much into them. I think that’s the temptation; that’s the whole idea. As I said, it doesn’t seem acceptable for them to stop there, for these to be just superficial images—whether you try to see something in them that isn’t there or you feel provoked by the absence to a point of aggression.
cul-de-sac. Be it dilettantish, artistic, kitschy, nihilistic, polemical, documentary, natural—the pictures, the lake, don't take responsibility for any of these readings. I find them attractive, but they don't invite you to dive into a spiritual or aesthetic daydream. They prevent you from doing that.

While preparing for the exhibition, you made some shelves that are chromed and covered in places with newsprint. But you didn't end up including them.

That's true. I decided not to include them in the show. There's a parallel between the photos and the shelves—also given

The problem isn't what you see or don't see, it's what the absence refers to. I feel these images can go in any direction, and every path ends in a cul-de-sac.
basement, I showed a junk room déjà vu with a rough and unassigned sense of responsibility for several pathological symptoms from recent contemporary art. Modified Billy IKEA shelves covered in places with feathers—where I combined two Zobernig icons, but also added other common materials: newspaper, chrome, rhinestones. Then I sanded them down to make them look ‘old’, shabby chic, used. When I started with them in Berlin, I had already taken all the photos of the lake. The photo series was a long-term project that I mainly worked on outside the studio. The shelves were done in the studio. Maybe it was just a chronological feeling.

The title of the show—but they didn’t work in the exhibition. The shelves come from a work I first made in Milan at Federico Vavassori’s space. In the
They suspected each other of sabotage. It was like each work distrusted the other as an artwork, and suddenly it looked like photographs and sculptures. The material of the painted cardboard, the way the photos were glued on, the way the pieces of cardboard were nailed to the walls with the nails then painted over again—all these important details were overruled. The show became too illustrative in terms of production.

You’d used shelves before.

Yes, I did quite a lot of them before in different variations. I was always interested when I brought the shelves to the space, the photos were already installed on the walls. I wanted to try it out, but they didn’t support each other.
in cabinets, shelves, and wardrobes, because they’re bound to circumstantial human life, stuck between necessary function and representative architectural form. While the form indicates a theoretical schema of historiography, they develop real signs of age. And, they’re made to store things, to contain something. Their designs connect to certain time periods, and they’re supposed to be witnesses to time, in terms of style or material wear. Of course, ever since this has been something people have paid attention to, style has been either real or fake. There have been imitations and homages, and now there is the ‘shabby chic’ look, which has become very popular, mainly in the upper middle class. I love the idea of making something look not just old or antique, but used, worn, or broken, as
a perverted added value.
I’m mainly interested in the surface. That’s where wear from time and historiography are located. I’ve used different methods to try to indicate time and wear, to speed up the aging process chemically and mechanically.

Could you say something about how you work with layering—in terms of materials (chrome on shelves, feathers on shelves, rhinestones on paintings) and/or information (blue filters applied to full-color images, hats used in various works in different formats over a period of time)?

You mention a good example. I put a blue filter in front of a series of photographs (film stills from Colmar & Strasbourg) and claimed that I’d put them under water.
Who’s supposed to believe that?

But the blue can also represent water if you want. That claim is also just a kind of simple poetry. But I think it’s important to show that things aren’t so special, so individual—as unique as advertising wants consumer culture’s products and lifestyles to seem, like tools for individualization. Nothing of this is groundbreaking really. The big achievement made by culture today isn’t difference and individuality—which is what’s supposed to be accessible through products, and especially through art—but rather standardization and consolidation.

Is that how you end up taking who knows how many photos of a lake instead of just getting them off the Internet?
10,000 photos and counting.