

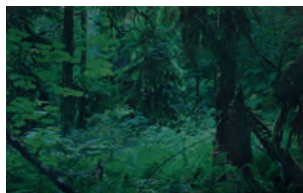
ON EXISTENCE AND THE INTRINSIC ESSENCE OF THINGS

Ultimately, in his entire oeuvre Holger Schmidhuber addresses the existence and special nature of the image per se and its message – possibly a result of his work between photography and painting exploring theories of perception – possibly. You could just as easily read his decision as a reaction to contemporary overloads, a direct response to the abundance, recurrence and persistence of images that seemingly have no special historical significance or roots, but whose existence is characterized by insistent self-evidence. However, with Schmidhuber it is not only a matter of manipulating available sources, but also of those images stored in our memories, notions of things

NICE

CONTROLLED BY NATURE XX, 2 0 1 3
80 x 125 cm . 31 1/2 x 49 3/16 inch
Mixed media on alu-dibond
Collection Schröter, Frankfurt/Main

we have assimilated, which are part and parcel of our culture. We need think only of the forest. In producing his works on this subject Schmidhuber was influenced by the myth of the German forest as an idealized and romanticized imago. That also goes for his views on nature, cities, figures in general – given that they are stored as established metaphors and icons of memory. With Schmidhuber however this always takes the form of presentation for discussion or questioning certain pictorial traditions. For the author the subject must possess an ascribed auratic or emotive potency. This fact consistently characterizes his motifs and anchors them in a network of connotations and possible associations. Only in this way do they captivate his attention, because it is with this potency that his means take effect.



DEATH ROW (2006) is an early example devoted to portrait. Hazy and soaked through with a layer of red pigment, the original documentary material of simple police photos of Americans sentenced to death is transformed into a new form of image. The status of photography is shifted in favor of the painterly intervention. An artistic addition that is not, however, based on an artisanal process, but is produced solely through the addition of paint. BRENTWOOD, the artist's latest body of work, bears the greatest similarity to these works. Schmidhuber bases and centers his creations on the face of the dead Marilyn Monroe, an autopsy shot of the investigating authorities and consequently an objective and unembellished photographic recording of naked facts, a recording expressed in a view and from above under differentiated and highly nuanced layers of paint. Pigment powder and glass powder give rise to a shimmering and mysterious misted impression, edge in between the outer and inner realms of the image and thus create an additional level, which asserts its right to exist. Regarding our perception of the object we experience a strange state of suspension between defining it and it slipping away from us, a state that ultimately corresponds with the atmosphere surrounding Monroe's case, where rumors and theories are constantly inflaming and confusing the issue. The only certainty here consists in the surface, from which a specific linguistic semantics



02 - 04 - 04, FLORIDA: JOHNNY L. ROBINSON 51 EXECUTED, 2 0 0 6
170 x 120 cm . 53 1/8 x 70 7/8 inch
Mixed media on alu-dibond
Collection Frech/Winklbauer, Berlin

emerges, patchy and restless, tangible and intangible at once. BRENTWOOD demonstrates afresh the ingenious concept of the artist, who, weary of the eternal production of images, now wishes to push forward to the core of the image itself, of perception and recollection. He cites the classic memorial picture, incorporates the occupation with figuration and abstraction into his pictorial dispute and in addition acts in full awareness of media massification and dilution. These are precisely the interfaces he explores and reflects on in his work. On the image – a window, a membrane, a postulate.

When we consider that image has always also been appearance and generates semblance (“Artworks are images as apparition, as appearance, and not as a copy”)¹ or reflect on the metaphor discussed since Classical Antiquity of the artwork as a sheath, a veil, then our author’s intention becomes more evident. His action takes place in the space between reality, projection and illusion. Or more accurately, on precisely this platform various movements occur that embed Schmidhuber’s work in a continuity of the image debate, which has for a long time been manifested specifically in this reciprocal “counterplay of revelation and concealment, of presence and absence, of transparency and materiality.”² However, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries this counterplay has been identified and recognized as a double coding of the artworks. This fact confirms that art is to be understood as a “laboratory,” constantly subjecting “pre-conditions, elements, rules of depiction and possible content” to unrelenting examination. A development in which “the question as to the concept and reality of the image practically emerges as the ‘key question’ per se of the modern age.”³

By means of decoding and transformation, Holger Schmidhuber devotes himself to visualizing this process and its conditions in creating images. That the photo of the dead Marilyn Monroe in particular should serve him as a starting point is quite natural. Her media persona alone, with all its symbolic complexity, promises and ensures a certain “added value.” Yet thanks to the artist’s painterly “trick,” a varnish settles on this foundation and a flickering spectacle captivates us that in truth is fed by the pool of artistic self-reflection.

Ellen Maurer Zilioli

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- ¹ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Edited by G. Adorno & R. Tiedemann, transl. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London, 2004), p. 110
- ² Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren*. (Munich, 2001), p. 9
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 281; and Gottfried Boehm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder."
In: *Was ist ein Bild?* (1994), p. 36