

## **CLOSE-UPS AND WIDE SHOTS – SURFACES, TEXTURES AND REPEATS AS METAPHORICAL PICTORIAL SPACES: NEW WORK BY RALF KASPERS, 2016**

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Based on compositional approaches that use the medium of photography in different ways, Ralf Kasper's large-format photographic works are situated, in terms of both subjects and aesthetics, in a field of tension where perspectives that derive from exterior moments of reality follow, at the same time, personal interpretations. Defined by both narrative and abstracting moments, Kasper's photographs present their own pictorial realities, either as series or as individual images. During the last few years, he has created a wealth of motifs focusing on the subject of landscape and on different aspects of a symbolic approach to object photography.

When looking at Kaspers' oeuvre today, one can see – despite the series' different subjects and aesthetics – both interior and overarching links in and between the individual series. Documentary aspects are juxtaposed with digital manipulations: effective lighting and colour manipulation reinforce the mood presented by the respective subjects. In this sense, Ralf Kasper's photographs time and again introduce individual readings of our experience of the world. The pieces shown in this 2016 exhibition are also representative of this approach.

As all-over compositions, they show close-ups, agglomerations and repeat patterns of natural phenomena (Four Elements, Roses, Ears of Wheat, Coal, Rare Earths, Waves, Honeycombs, Propolis, in dialogue with unfamiliar perspectives of structurally abstracted motifs from the material world of artefacts (Dollars, Euros). Another picture, whose representational qualities misguide us into believing that we are looking at a reddish-green woven rug, on closer inspection turns out to show carefully arranged rows of firecrackers. Once you realise the true nature of those orderly rows, besides their neat pictoriality, the 'bangers' conjure up images of the chain reaction of an explosion. In light of this thought, the work contains an indirect critical subtext underneath its aesthetic 'tapestry' surface.

In this exhibition, further critical aspects also become apparent in a picture featuring rows of consecrated hosts that, set against a white background, appear translucent and ephemeral. A symbol of the incarnation of Christ for the redemption of humankind and one of Christianity's central subjects, it is precisely the communion ritual during which the hosts are given to participants that is a divisive issue. Carefully digitally composed, there are also fine tears running through the rows of hosts, allowing the image to point beyond its aesthetic presence and be seen as symbolic in the context of the other works shown in this exhibition.

The individual subjects are always disassociated from any spatial environment in order to present a canon of pictures resulting from the interaction of documentary illusion and digital suggestion. From an art history perspective, this canon is reminiscent of the fields of abstract art, colour field painting, minimal art and

arte povera, as well as their potential photographic translations. The pictures of waves in this exhibition also allow art-historical reflections.

#### WAVES AND METAPHORS OF NATURE

The Great Wave off Kanagawa, often simply referred to as The Wave, is certainly one of the most famous colour woodcuts from a series of 36 perspectives of Mount Fuji by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai. Created in the first half of the 19th century and often cited in many different pictorial contexts, The Wave belongs to our consciously or subconsciously internalised collective pictorial memory. As a metaphor that finds its symbolic content in nature, the picture combines the threat posed by water as a force of nature with the static Mount Fuji, recognisable in the background, which, being a volcano, is also able to generate unpredictable and menacing eruptions. The water with the oversized, breaking wave is reminiscent of a tsunami following an earthquake and represents an exceptional condition of the element of water. Furthermore, in painting and in psychology, water is also often used to symbolise the depth of the soul and the unfathomable.

The two large-format photographic wave pictures in this exhibition are also reminiscent of the above-described layers of meaning. Offering a contemporary interpretation of the motif, unlike Hokusai, Kaspers does not present the wave in painterly blue shades with white foam in front of Mount Fuji. The memories and the menace relating to the recent tsunamis in Thailand (2004) and Japan (2011) are anchored in our minds, finding a possible translation in Kasper's pictures in the form of monumental photographic perspectives of waves in a range of black and grey shades, against which the white sea foam stands out as a photographic-microscopic detail study.

These detail-oriented aspects of photographically staged nature studies are also introduced in other motifs presented in Kasper's current exhibition. Besides the above-mentioned works, these include close-ups of elegantly vanishing smoke, of the black and white remains of leaves whose graphical structure is defined by impermanence and disintegration,

while the vibrant colours present in the pictures featuring a 'bed' of red rose petals and the repeat patterns of honeycombs and Propolis are reminiscent of colour field painting and can be seen as belonging together in terms of subject.

Like the disintegrating leaves, in the context of this exhibition, the glowing coals or rows of briquettes can also be interpreted as images representing the archaic cycles of nature, while Rare Earths features stone formations, which, like sculptures, are arranged in a display case and, given their monetary value, appear to be kept under lock and key.

Unlike the photography of the New Objectivity from the first few decades of the 20th century, where many photographers chose an objective-documentary approach guided by reality to study people, things, landscapes, surfaces, forms and structures, Ralf Kaspers composes his object photography as suggestive digital constructions.

Once again, in his 2016 exhibition, he is not concerned with depicting reality as accurately as possible. Instead, his focus is on offering aesthetic-symbolic interpretations. Here too, while what seems like a representation of an aspect of reality or of a row of objects may, indeed, be based on a reality that was recorded photographically, instead turns out to be a designed illusion and presents itself to the viewer as a suggestion of interpretational spaces.

TEXT: BARBARA HOFMANN-JOHNSON, 2016

Director of the Museum für Photographie Braunschweig since 2016. She studied art history, German studies, theater, film and television studies and worked as a freelance curator with a focus on contemporary art and photography. Between 2003 and 2016, she worked as a freelancer at the Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur and held various teaching positions, including at the Folkwang University of the Arts Essen. In 2018, she was guest curator of the exhibition "Bernd, Hilla and the Others - Photography from Düsseldorf" at Huis Marseille - Museum for Photography Amsterdam.