

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Landscape (Distance and Removal)

March 31 – June 10, 2007

Works by:

Collective Actions

Ceal Floyer

Valérie Jouve

Dominic McGill

Sun Tag Noh

John Pilson

Marco Poloni

Seth Price

Emily Richardson

Sean Snyder

Chris Welsby

An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curator

Katrin Mundt

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Short description

Württembergischer Kunstverein is presenting the „**Landscape (Distance and Removal)**“ / „**Landschaft (Entfernung)**“ project from **March 31 to June 10, 2007**. The exhibition presents eleven artistic positions that each examine the phenomenon of landscape in very different ways, both in terms of form and content. They focus on the more or less natural physical landscapes as well as on their representation in art. They test and appropriate **landscape as a medium for ideological messages, as a mirror and stage of the (artist) subject, as a fatigued form of artistic expression, and as material for alternative spatial concepts.**

The exhibition features works from the past thirty years, including **films, videos, photographs, drawings and a site-specific installation**. The exhibition will also include a film programme (April 27) and a **performance** by video artist, director and author **Rabih Mroué** (April 28).

Conventionally, landscape is equated with notions of idyllically transfigured nature, an obsolete artistic tradition or, prosaically, the geographical formations characteristic of a certain place. In contrast, today landscape is understood rather as a **material and result of producing space**. It is created in accordance with (more or less clearly identifiable) political, ideological, traditional or individual interests and is hence their expression and representation. It appears «natural» to the observer for the sole reason that the causes and motives underlying its creation are not (made) visible: In this sense, landscape is a polemic positing of meaning that fails to supply its justification. Constantly disputed, it is a **temporary physical arrangement**.

While conventional forms of depicting landscapes in art served the purpose of drafting, affirming and naturalising these ideologically determined spaces, the positions presented here are, in contrast, driven by the suspicion that the ostensible transparency of space is in fact an optical illusion. This is a systematic attempt to sabotage the trimming of landscape to an ideological essence of meaning. It is replaced by **multi-perspective and often contradictory views of landscape**. For example, the works on show at the exhibition choose different forms of artistic intervention that inscribe themselves directly into the surface of the landscape, confronting incompatible landscape images with each other with the purpose of mutual devaluation, or analysing spaces with the aid of critical, documentary strategies between classical research and artistic orientation.

These different approaches to the phenomenon of landscape may be interpreted in a more general sense as an examination of **problems of distance and removal**. The works use and question strategies of critical or physical distancing, observation from a distance or in detail, media refraction in order to alienate and, at the same time, make visible in a new way (i.e. cancelling distance), and processes of gradual or radical removal and remodelling of space.

Works

Valérie Jouve, Grand Littoral

Video installation, 2003, 20' (Loop)

Grand Littoral is set in the outlying district of Marseilles of the same name, which is also the location of a large shopping centre. Against the backdrop of this suburban landscape that, characterised by sparse vegetation, views of high-rise housing estates, urban motorways and supermarket car parks, ostentatiously presents itself as a non-place, the camera follows several individuals. Alone or in small groups, they move around this landscape, with no apparent goal or reason for their action. Some of them meet up, others pass by without taking any notice of each other, or just go their own way. For all the randomness, their movements still appear to obey a loose choreography. Here, the edge of the city becomes a timeless, placeless stage, on which minimal narrations unfold with their own dynamics, direction and dramaturgy. The people become actors, the lines of their movement become threads of narrative, crossing each other at certain points. Thus, *Grand Littoral* takes the form of a genre hybrid, suspended in the realm between landscape and portrait.

Dominic McGill, Project for a New American Century

Drawing, graphite on paper, 2003

Dominic McGill's work, whose title quotes the name of a think-tank of the US Republican Party, is a critical and, in terms of form, polemic treatment of the history of the late twentieth century. Of striking size and carried out with a suitably expressive gesture, this approximately 2 x 20 metre large drawing suspended from the ceiling is a chronicle of the wars and scandals, victories and discoveries, conspiracies and disasters since the bombing of Hiroshima. The work combines text and images – rampant typographies, comic-style reduced or hyperrealistic drawings, slogans in balloons and diagrams – so as to not only illustrate the diachrony of the events but also their mutual references and dependencies. The result is a kind of political landscape in time, in which the individual event becomes manifest in its fatal entanglement in the «whole rest».

Chris Welsby, Wind Vane

16mm double projection, 1972, 8' (Loop)

The double projection shows pictures from Hampstead Heath in London. Two 16mm cameras mounted on tripods with wind vane attachments were positioned some distance apart in the park. They move independently and are controlled by wind conditions alone. In the exhibition space, two film sequences are shown that were recorded simultaneously by the two cameras.

In this set-up, the relation between the film-recording apparatus and its object is seemingly detached from any conscious intention and left to the “elements” or chance. However, this impression of “non-invasive” observation is thwarted in several respects: First of all, by the well-considered form of recording and presentation, and by the visible interventions on the picture plane (for instance traces of editing the film strips), and by the observer's automatic desire to fill the contingency of the images with narrative. The parallel projection of two incongruent film sequences with their own dynamics and perspective thus creates an effect of extreme disorientation and fragmentation that opposes any targeted view of landscape.

Ceal Floyer, Warning Birds

Self-adhesive birds, 2002

Ceal Floyer installs countless silhouettes of birds of prey on the windows on the Kunstverein facing the Schlossgarten – mass-produced pictograms used on windows and reflecting glass façades to protect songbirds. Floyer's intervention shifts the addressee of the «warning», turning it inward, to the

viewer. In this inversion, the extreme accumulation of reduced bird images not only creates a latent state of menace between transparency and darkening, but also evokes the flock of birds as a consummate symbol of the uncanny. As such the work suspends the protective distance between the observer and the landscape, between the inside and outside, and marks the invasion of a menacing or “indefinite” landscape into the interior.

Emily Richardson, Aspect

16mm film, 2004, 9' (Loop)

Aspect is based on material that Emily Richardson filmed in King's Wood, Great Britain, over the course of one year. Similar to earlier works, Richardson explores the phenomenon of light and its fixation and analysis in the medium of film. She deploys the method of time-lapse photography, used primarily for scientific, documentary purposes, in order to capture the seasonal changes in the vegetation and landscape. Thanks to this technique, she succeeds in capturing light effects that seem to bring the wood to life, lending it a three-dimensional depth in which the image planes multiply and overlap. The wood itself becomes a projection that is reproduced on itself. It appears surreal and at the same time uncanny and transfigured. The analytical distance that the medium promises to create is thus turned into its opposite. The film projection in the exhibition space, finally, doubles this effect and combines with the soundtrack, electronically post-edited atmospheric sounds, to create a suggestive film composition.

Seth Price, Romance

Video, 2003, 35' (Loop)

Seth Price's video work is based on the *Adventure* computer game, the prototype of the “adventure game” genre that would develop from it later. Unlike current games with lavish 3D animations, *Adventure* is purely text-based, i.e. the entire plot takes place in a written dialogue between the machine and the player, as a relatively linear sequence of place descriptions, tasks, instructions, questions and answers.

Seth Price's *Romance* documents his progress through the game from the start to “game over”, playing with the illusion of three-dimensionality and interactivity. The viewers follow the dialogue, that seems to be taking place in real time, entering, so to speak, the imaginary space of *Adventure*. The fact that it is a *text* space also evokes thematic references to the medium of literature: The sceneries described in the game – dilapidated houses, dark dungeons, dead trees – seem to quote a literary source, the romantic gothic novel and its uncanny landscapes. In this way, Price's video combines several seemingly incompatible media-specific models of space – the interactive “Adventure” landscapes of the computer game, the linear text spaces of literature, and the image worlds of video – causing them to mirror and comment on each other.

Collective Actions, Trips out of Town

Slide installation, 1976-2007

Collective Actions, Stuttgart Comment on the Performance „German Romantics“ by the Collective Actions group

Sound installation, 2007

The Moscow-based artist group Collective Actions has been carrying out conceptual performances on the periphery of the Russian capital in a varying line-up since 1976. These are minimal but precisely choreographed actions performed by the group or by individuals on an empty, usually snow-covered, tree-lined field. The thus defined «field of action» becomes the scene of non-events, or rather events whose significance consists not in the execution or observation of a particular action, but rather in the perception of its perception. As, for example, in the *Losung 1980* (Slogan 1980) in which one of the artists is given written instructions to fasten a veiled banner between two trees on the edge of a field, to move a few hundred metres away, to unveil the slogan on the banner from this distance using a

special device, only to find that it cannot be read from this distance. The journey out of town thus culminates in a systematic shift and dissipation of meaning.

The exhibition presents a selection from the photographic, filmic and written documentation of the «actions» that may be seen as their programmatic continuation in the sense of their further multiplication and dissolution.

John Pilson, Misty Harbor (I-IV)

4-part photo series, 2002

In his work, Pilson documents the internal workings of an investment bank in New York's financial district. During night and weekend shifts, he photographed the virtually deserted offices – a kind of *twilight zone*, in which seemingly profane details gel into mysterious settings. Here, outside the working phases, the logic of productivity and efficiency, collective vision and corporate identity give way to an atmosphere of indeterminacy and almost disconcerting intimacy. Pilson's other-worldly office landscapes and desk still lifes seem to uncover the depth psychology of a company whose global operations and speculations usually ingrain themselves in our everyday spaces in a very real way.

Sun Tag Noh, The StrAnge Ball

Photographs (18 from a series of 52), digital prints, 2004

Sun Tag NOH's photo series is a study of the South Korean village of Daechu-ri, where a landmark manifests the presence of the American occupying power in Korea for miles around. It is a spherical radar facility installed by the American army on the site of their military base Camp Humphrey. The «strange ball», whose actual significance and use are secret, is not an abstract threat: For the inhabitants of the village it represents the ongoing expansion of the military site, involving expropriation and expulsion of the rural population. As such, it becomes the target of criticism by civil rights campaigners and activists rallying for the withdrawal of American troops. The photo series revolves in a sense around the «ball», that sometimes fits in organically with the landscape, indeed often almost disappearing in it, sometimes towering out of it like a minimalist sculpture, hovering over it majestically like a celestial body or ominously like a warning portent. NOH stages the ball as an exposed, omnipresent but, as such, also changeable and inconspicuous object. It is a kind of amorphous foreign body, adapting to the landscape with perfect mimicry. It marks a suspicion, an ideological occupation of space, but also the networks of opposition that it brings into the arena.

Marco Poloni, Displacement Island

69-part photo series, digital prints, 2006

In his photo series, Poloni combines images of varying origin to create a fragmentary portrait of the Mediterranean Italian island of Lampedusa. Pictures by the artist, photos from holiday catalogues, anonymous snapshots by amateur photographers, and pictures from the news, taken on the island itself but also in other places, follow the traces left by two contrary groups of «travellers» on the island: Tourists visiting the holiday paradise of Lampedusa in the summer months and refugees from North Africa, who land on the island in the winter months under life-threatening circumstances in the hope of finding a better life in Europe or who die en route.

Similar to Poloni's earlier works, the formally very heterogeneous photos, hung separately or in groups, combine to create a loose sequence of fragmentary visual hints with the aid of which the viewer must derive their meaning, logical connections or narrative links. The almost detective-like view that this work demands causes the island of Lampedusa to appear as an ambivalent, suspicious landscape. At the same time it bears fictional traits that evoke images from our collective imagination: journey, exile, the romantic adventurer and the modern-day slave.

Sean Snyder, A Revisionist Model of Solidarity

Multimedia installation, 2004-2005

In his work, Sean Snyder traces the reconstruction of the city of Skopje that was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1963. On the basis of archive pictures of the city, construction work and planning by the teams of architects headed by the Japanese Kenzo Ande, Snyder traces the visionary (demiurgical?) creative architectural will in view of the tabula rasa of an effaced city, its clash with Yugoslavian realpolitik, but also the emergence of an international, utopian community of helpers.

The modernist dream of the artistic-architectural (re-)creation of the world from a model, the transfiguration of a plannable future, and the utopian belief in the feasibility of a better community are rudely confronted here with a precarious social and political reality. At a central point of the installation we see the projection of a seismograph, whose needle is translating measuring data into a jagged curve with an unpleasant scratching noise. Here, once again, the equation of measurability, transparency and control proves to be an illusion.

Dates

Press conference:

Friday, March 30, 2007, 11 am

Press release and images:

<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press>

Opening Reception:

Friday, March 30 2007, 7 pm

Film programme:

Profile and Panorama

Friday, April 27 2007, 7 pm

Performance:

Rabih Mroué: Make Me Stop Smoking

Saturday, April 28, 8 pm

Contact

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Opening hours:

Tue, Thu-Sun: 11 am – 6 pm

Wed: 11 am – 8 pm

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