



Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Wild Signals

Artistic Positions between Symptom and Analysis

September 13 – November 9, 2008



Kevin Schmidt, Wild Signals

Corinne May Botz
Sorel Cohen
Martin Dammann
Charles Gaines
Jana Gunstheimer
Susan Hiller
Joachim Koester
Joshua Mosley
Pablo Pijnappel
Tim Roda
Kevin Schmidt

Curators

Iris Dressler, Hans D. Christ

Introduction

From September 13 to November 9, 2008, the Württembergischer Kunstverein is presenting the exhibition “Wild Signals. Artistic Positions between Symptom and Analysis.” The exhibition comprises around 100 works by eleven international artists who have appropriated scientific methods in different ways. Historical documents are subjected to a shifted reading. The instruments and discourses of criminology, psychoanalysis, ethnology, natural and parasciences are borrowed as much as questioned. With an attitude that is as critical as it is ironical, the artists confront that production of truth that seeks to master the unknown and the incomprehensible and that rests on the denial of its own fallacies.

Speculation and staging, as techniques intrinsic to scientific thought, its experiments and reasonings, receive special attention – not least because this is the point at which aesthetic and scientific practices intersect. For example, stage, photography and film have long been described as instruments of knowledge, that serve not to prove but rather to actually produce and stage knowledge.

“Wild Signals” presents artistic mis-en-scènes of knowledge – and non-knowledge – in which the performative aspect is manifest. Here, knowledge appears in an open resonant space in which fact and possibility, what may be interpreted and what may not, are mutually conditional. In this context, the exhibition deploys two artistic strategies (and their overlapping): The analysis and simulation of findings, evidence and symptoms.

The exhibition’s title refers to Kevin Schmidt’s video installation of the same name.

Works / Artists

Corinne May Botz (*1977 in Ridgewood, lives in New York)

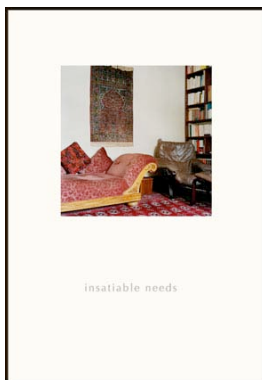
The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, 2004
Series of 19 digital prints (selection), varying sizes



The photographs document a collection of meticulously created crime scene models made by the American Frances Glessner Lee in the 1940s. Each of the doll's house-like dioramas presents a composite of various unsolved criminal cases. Lee called her eighteen models, that she created for the training of police officers, Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death. They were designed on the basis of police reports, while the detailed furnishings of the various crime scenes were the product of Lee's imagination. She mostly set the violent scenes in lower middle-class interiors. Corinne May Botz re-interpreted Lee's interpretations of crime, usually showing excerpts and details of the models. She first published her photographs in the form of a publication in 2004.

Sorel Cohen (*1936 in Montreal, lives in Montreal)

Divans Dolorosa, 2008
Series of fourteen photographs on sand-blasted glass, 50.8 x 40.6cm each



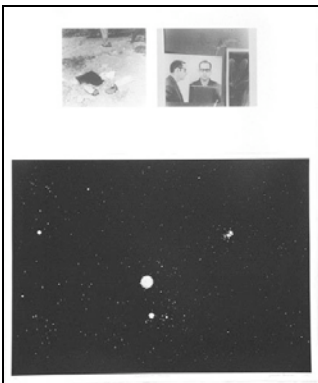
Sorel Cohen's "Divans Dolorosa" series shows photographs that the artist took in the consultation rooms of fourteen different psychoanalysts from Quebec. The focus in each case is on the couch – the icon of Freud's "talking cure". The rooms and couches are empty. In some cases the setting is classical and rich in decor, in others modernistically plain. Each photo is assigned one concept from the field of psychoanalysis describing a particular symptom: "irrational anxiety", "repressed memories", "obsessive fixation", etc. Do they refer to absent patients? Do they analyse the doctor's style of interior decoration?

Martin Dammann (*1965 in Friedrichshafen, lives in Berlin)
Soldier Studies, 2007
Series of 18 (from 24) digital prints, approx. 70 x 43cm each



Martin Dammann's works are based on an extensive collection of photographs from the two world wars. The "Soldier Studies" series focuses on German World War II soldiers involved in various "cross-dressing" scenarios. Often they are re-enacting stereotypical situations of respectable married life. These testimonies are not so much indicative of a homoerotic or transvestite desire as of a repression of reality, that is to say, of the projection of middle class normalcy in the midst of the soldier's everyday life during a war.

Charles Gaines (*1944 in Charleston, lives in Los Angeles)
Night Crimes, 1997
Series of four photomontages



For "Night Crimes" Charles Gaines researched in the archives of the Los Angeles Times for crime scene pictures and portraits of criminals, witnesses and surviving dependants. In the four photomontages he assigns persons to each scene of a crime, while in fact there is no connection between them. The third element he adds is a sky chart displaying the constellation at the time of the crime – though fifty years later. A caption, finally, shows the time and place of the crime and of the future night-time sky. The cogency of the photograph and its interpretation is cast back upon the mere suggestive force of images. The constellation as a potential context of justification for the crime shifts science, founded on the construction of causality, into the realm of speculation.

Jana Gunstheimer (*1974, lives in Jena)

Stammsitz, Arbeitszimmer A. Krupp, 2005, water color on paper,
300 x 350 cm

VH1/05, 2005, 9 water colors, b/w, each 30 x 40 cm

63 days later, 2005, Installation with water colors and objects



In her work – ensembles of black-and-white drawings and watercolors, architectural models, wall works, objects and print media – Jana Gunstheimer, who studied art and ethnology, takes a critical, tongue-in-cheek look at the structures of scientific methods. The basis of her studies is NOVA PORTA, an “organization for coping with risks”, as fictitious as it is active, that, among other things, observes the behaviour of individuals without employment in a long-term study. The construction and reconstruction of the research findings coincide. This also applies to the “Stammsitz” project, a work in progress that examines the Krupp dynasty and its domicile, the Villa Hügel in Essen. A group of young people are said to have secretly entered this villa in 2005, making several changes and performing mysterious rituals. In different arrangements, Gunstheimer collates, inventories and catalogues the documentation of this case, that she herself produced. Photographic and film documentation media are consistently replaced with drawings and paintings. The suggested background stories constitute neither a coherent narrative nor conclusive results. Nevertheless, these are critical analyses of today’s living conditions.

Susan Hiller (*1942 in Tallahassee, lives in London)

The Curiosities of Sigmund Freud, 2005

9 iris prints, 76.2 x 50.8cm each



“The Curiosities of Sigmund Freud” is based on eight tiny microscope slides, called “miniature curiosities for the microscope”, possessed by the Freud family, probably by

Sigmund Freud himself. They are micro-dots of collages of paintings and photographs created with a camera connected to a microscope, only visible when greatly magnified. During Freud's day, the act of gradual visualization was a popular pastime; later micro-dots were used in cryptology. Owing to the low technical quality, however, the curious miniatures from the house of Freud only produce very unclear images. Susan Hiller created magnified prints of these, in some cases colored and with the original titles. The shadowy images are extremely hard to make out.

The ninth picture in Hiller's series is not from the miniature slides but shows the magnified passage of a letter from Freud to his fiancée. What we see is an ink blot around which Freud drew a circle and commented on as follows: "Here the pen fell out of my hand and inscribed these secret signs. I beg your forgiveness and ask that you do not trouble yourself with an interpretation."

Joachim Koester (*1962 in Copenhagen, lives in New York)

The Magic Mirror of John Dee
Photograph, approx. 70 x 90cm



The photo shows the surface of the "Magic Mirror" of John Dee, one of the leading scientists of the early seventeenth century, who also devoted himself to in-depth experiments with the supernatural. The magic mirror and other objects of his occult research are today on show at the British Museum in London. Joachim Koester shows us the scratched black surface of the mirror, in which we can see vague reflections of light. An accompanying text refers to the scientist and his medium, the alchemist Edward Kelley, who was condemned as a swindler, and to his communication with angels induced with the aid of mirrors and crystal balls. Dee derived the angelic "Enochian" language from these experiments. His desire to attain greater clarity regarding the world, however, remained unfulfilled.

Joshua Mosley (*1974 in Dallas, lives in Philadelphia)

dread, 2007

Mixed media animation, 6 min., Edition of Five,

Plus an edition of six and one Artist's Proof with five sculptures (not in the exhibition)



Inspired by Blaise Pascal's "Pensées" (1669) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Emile" (1762), in his mixed media animation "dread" Joshua Mosley drafts a fictitious dialogue between the two philosophers, who wrote their major works some one hundred years apart. The subject is the relationship between man and nature, the question as to whether things are there by themselves or created by god and are therefore good. In a free interpretation of the two thinkers, Mosley exaggerates two contrary positions: The postulate of a recognizable and unquestionable truth and the acceptance of the incomprehensibility of last things. Both thinkers are engaged in a dispute during a walk through a forest, in the course of which they come across a wild dog that attacks and kills Rousseau, the advocate of goodness in nature. The title of the work and the dog refer to Eadweard Muybridge's photographic studies of movement with a dog of the same name.

Pablo Pijnappel (*1979 in Paris, lives in Amsterdam)

Felicitas, 2005

Three-channel slide projection, 24 min.



In his film works and slide installations, Pablo Pijnappel re/constructs the unusual paths through life of various family members and their acquaintances all over the world. He draws on the family archive and other historical visual documents in his montages of text, pictures and sound. His narratives oscillate between the credible and the incredible, the mundane and the grotesque, although the traces of neither one can be fully uncovered.

The three-part slide projection "Felicitas" revolves around the story of Felicitas Baer, daughter of a German industrialist who emigrated to Brazil with his family after World War I. Following a plane crash, Felicitas, who had founded a dance school in Rio de Janeiro, lived for more than twenty years with various indigenous tribes, before returning to Rio and becoming friends with Pijnappel's mother. Felicitas's tale intersects with the equally "exotic" lives of other figures. It follows no chronological order nor plausible causal connections throughout. In the sequence of pictures and text, some motifs are repeated, zooming in on them as if to emphasize their veracity, which at the same time becomes disputable.

Tim Roda (*1977 in Lancaster, lives in New York)
23 Photographs, b/w, various sizes, 2003 – 2007



Tim Roda's black-and-white photographs are based on elaborate stage-like installations in which he interacts with his family. The opulent sets are furnished with numerous obscure, fantastic props made from everyday materials and remnants, that the actors use for their performance. The possible meanings of these objects only evolve in the "make believe" of the acting, but whose covenants we do not fully comprehend. The scenarios appear theatrical and improvised. For all the exhibition, they create the impression of witnessing a mysterious, clandestine ritual, oscillating on the borderline between carefree play, secret desires, and potential encroachments. The makeshift nature of the scenarios corresponds to the deliberately careless handling of the photo material, that displays splashes of chemicals or crooked cut edges.

Kevin Schmidt (*1972, lives in Vancouver)
Wild Signals, 2007
Video installation, 9.42 min., loop



"Wild Signals" shows a stage rig installed as if by magic in the uninhabited, snowy valley of a mountain landscape. We hear that minimalist, five-note sequence of sounds that served to communicate with extraterrestrials in the Hollywood classic "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (Steven Spielberg, 1977). Spielberg based this on scientific sound and color experiments of the 19th century, as for example Jean-François Sudre's musical language Solresol: the model of a universal, tone-based system of communication. The static scenery in "Wild Signals" is counteracted by various interpretations of the sequence of sounds, the colorful play of the spotlights, and artificial fog patches. It remains unclear whom this futile spectacle addresses. It calls for neither the two known kinds nor for the third kind.

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Press conference

Friday September 12, 2008, 11 am

Opening

Friday September 12, 2008, 8 pm

Artist's tour

Saturday, September 13, 2008, 1 pm

Contact press

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Press release and images at

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

An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curators

Iris Dressler, Hans D. Christ

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