

AURORA NOIR

Erwin Kneihsl, Chrystèle Lerisse, Zsu Szabo, Miroslav Tichý

25.07. – 05.09.2020 · Treignac Projet, France

Curated by Cora Waschke

As a medium, photography combines two conflicting poles: on one side the technical, objective method of recording the world, and on the other the magical moment of light-formed images. Its designation as *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46) by photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot, refers to the scientific, evidential value of photography. But it was precisely because of this idea that photography produced 'scientific' images with a technical apparatus 'unaffected by human hands' that led it to be used as evidence of paranormal phenomena. For example, in Spiritist circles of the 19th and early 20th century, double exposures and light veils were used to produce 'evidence' of ghosts.

Photography served to communicate with the deceased; it was a means of making the invisible visible, a medium between this mortal world and the after world, between science and mystery. Its acheiropoietic character thus also gives photography a religious dimension, as Roland Barthes reflects in *La chambre claire* (1980): "Perhaps this astonishment, this persistence reaches down into the religious substance out of which I am moulded; nothing for it: Photography has something to do with resurrection: might we not say of it what the Byzantines said of the image of Christ which impregnated Veronica's napkin: that it was not made by hand of man, acheiropoietos?"

Neither the unrestricted objectivity of photography nor its ability to record ghosts is believed today. However, these still form a field of tension in which photographs and the way they are viewed move. It remains a fascination how the latent image becomes visible in the darkroom on a white sheet immersed in the developer liquid. It is the moment of a birth - an act of creation: "God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day' and the darkness he called 'night'" (Genesis). This creation myth is inscribed in the medium of photography both in classic and in digital photography, which is also a drawing of light.

Already by the 1970s a return of the sacred was observed in our supposedly secular age (*The Return of the Sacred*, Daniel Bell, 1977). The development of this Religious Turn led Jürgen Habermas to speak of a "post-secular society", in which "religious thinking allows itself to be critically presented" (Habermas, 2001). Sigrid Weigel, also noted that there is a "interweaving of the secularized world with religious patterns of interpretation" (2004). This can be recognized in the religious, cultic and mystical allusions in works of a largely profaned art creation and art business.

This exhibition is not devoted to ironic references, as the seemingly spiritistic photo sequences by Anna and Bernhard Blume (e.g. *Wahnzimmer*, 1985), or provocative confrontations of explicit religious symbols and depictions with contemporary (photographic) aesthetics, such as with David LaChapelle's series *Jesus is my homeboy* (2003). Rather, the works shown here are concerned with tracking down the tension between apparatus-based mechanical observation and human observation; between chemical-physical recording and magical charging or interpretation through photography. The exhibition shows works in which the special material and media means and influences of photography are used reciprocally to capture, reproduce and evoke moments that are experienced as magical, alchemical, creative or spiritual.

Erwin Kneihsl

Born 1952 in Vienna, lives and works in Vienna, Austria

Erwin Kneihsl's works as well as his working method, evidence his absolute and expert dedication to photography, which he understands as an alchemical process. His photographs of the sun are a radical reduction to the essentials of photography. The direct sunlight draws its own image as a result of converted, blackened silver grains. In his favoured form of presentation, Kneihsl's hand produced prints are emphasized as material objects beyond their surreal, pictorial dimension.

Chrystèle Lерisse

Born 1960 in Le Mans, lives and works in the Limousin region, France

The small format of Chrystèle Lерisse's photographs requires close and precise observation. An intimate connection is created between the photographer's own viewing and her captured observations. These observations are in themselves unspectacular or commonplace. But in a seemingly constructivist approach, the artist uses them to explore the possibilities of photography - such as exposure, focus and cropping - to the limits of recognizability. The resulting photographs appear less as illustrations of reality than as fragmented images of memories and dreams.

Miroslav Tichý

Born 1926 in Nětčice, +2011 in Kyjov, Czech Republic

In Miroslav Tichý's photographic work, some of the paradigms of photography are undermined. The perfect reproductive transparency of the medium in relation to observed reality is already destabilised by his specially manufactured cameras made of found materials, such as cardboard rolls and bottle bottoms, as well as by the hours developing in his open-air water bath. Though a trained artist, he was seen as a lunatic; his cameras as amateurish imitations. But this enabled him to surreptitiously capture images of women in innumerable photographs, women who do not pose, but are depicted in unselfconscious action. Together with the veil of photographic 'disturbances', this is what makes the poetry in Tichý's works so special.

Zsu Szabo

Born 1975 in Sopron, lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Sopron, Hungary

The video work by photographer Zsu Szabo shows a woman in a dark room moving her hand along her body with an electric light source in a flowing movement. By apparently washing or painting herself with the light, parts of her body are temporarily illuminated and thus become recognizable. In a sensual-ritual dance between light and body, the woman draws an ephemeral self-portrait into cinematic space-time.