

gute aussichten – new german photography 2012/2013

The seven prizewinners and a first glimpse of their projects

HENNING BODE // THE CHILDREN OF KING COTTON

'King Cotton' is synonymous with the importance of cotton plantations in America's southern states before the Civil War (1861–1865). Nowadays, many of the almost three million inhabitants of the federal state of Mississippi survive on the lowest rungs of the social ladder in terms of education, incomes and healthcare. Henning Bode spent several weeks travelling around what is still the rural landscape of the Mississippi Delta to meet the local people and to learn more about their lives, culture and personalities. His vivid photographs are distilled into a melange of pride and humour, rhythm and joie de vivre as well as poverty and poor prospects, a will to survive and hospitality, all set to the atmospheric backdrop of Delta Blues melodies.

SUSANN DIETRICH // THE SINGING CHIRP OF MOTHER-OF-PEARL

Collecting, conserving, remembering, transforming and presenting are the theoretical cornerstones of Susann Dietrich's artistic activities. Quickly, an impression emerges of a never-ending flow that over the years has incorporated materials of the most diverse form and provenance, allowing them to re-emerge at some point in a remodelled state. What Susann Dietrich finds undergoes a transformation process with and through her, where ideas like "dissolution of the motif, concentrating structures, bright colourfulness, transparency, movement, displacement, repetition and overlapping" (quoted after: Susann Dietrich) play an important role. In the process, photographs, objects, drawings or etchings are created in which the 'finds' begin a life in the concentrated, transformed state of a brand-new existence permeated by a very unique style of poetry.

SASKIA GRONEBERG // OFFICE PLANT

Whether well-tended and cared for or straggly and left alone – whatever the case, the office plant is the anarchic polar opposite to a working world which forces its own rhythm and rules upon us. Not a boss in the world will risk taking action against the 'intimate' green interiors of his employees' office rooms and tables. That would be sacrilege! The office plant simultaneously represents two things: firstly, it reveals something about the personality of the individual taking care of it, and secondly, next to the coffee cup and maybe a photo of husband and child, it is probably the only bastion of a personal touch in a functionally designed environment. The potted plant becomes the incarnation of freedom. It is synonymous with that world which – like stepping into the office – is hung on coat stands until the close of business.

SVETLANA MYCHKINE // SUGAR BLUE

Orphanages are probably not especially friendly places anywhere in the world. Homes and centres of this kind generally have an air about them which is filled with the depressing mix of functionality, compulsive order, (necessary) discipline and a daily ordered routine, set up to reflect the coincidence of a state institution and duty of care as well as the individual's needs. Svetlana Mychkine visited various orphanages in Russia. Her series 'sugar blue' offers insights into a way of life that continues to be dominated by the spirit of what was once called 'real Socialism' in the USSR. In constructing a living environment, the Socialist and Communist worldview was expressed in strictly functional, unembellished architectural style. We are therefore invited to glimpse inside bedrooms or dining rooms where the interiors reveal not the slightest trace of any personal effects. Studies show that orphans growing up in a collectively influenced environment suffer acutely from loneliness and isolation. One look into the children's faces speaks volumes...

NICOLAI RAPP // DEAD WHITE MEN'S CLOTHES

Six tightly packed bales appear on a white background – at first sight, Nicolai Rapp's picture strategy is reminiscent of a contemporary liaison between minimalist sculpture and conceptual photography. 'Wrapping' – the photographer's own word – is the starting point for the series. Veiled or wrapped elements always arouse our (voyeuristic) curiosity, given that they do not voluntarily yield their inner core. While we are confident that we know and can identify what is visible and often our gaze carelessly glides over it, our attention is involuntarily attracted to that detail which appears in a less obvious guise. Therefore, at a second or third glance we are able to identify something familiar in the bales which are tied together, even though the context remains unclear. The large banner may provide us with a distant reading aid, pointing to a building draped with textile sheets. These could perhaps be second or third uses for those textiles which find their way in tightly pressed bales from Europe to Africa.

FABIAN ROOK // DESKTOP EVIDENCE

Fabian Rook shows three different photo series – his 'journey' takes him to Mexico and Japan, ending with a third, fictional documentary of the troubled regions in the Middle East. It only becomes clear upon closer inspection that these are not reproductions originating from the photographer's camera during an actual trip. Instead, Fabian Rook has put the spotlight on the image world of Google Street View and produced screenshots of his places of choice. Thanks to processing and montage work, he creates an aesthetic that references the specific picture strategies of American photographers like Joel Sternfeld and Stephen Shore. By reverting to the auto-produced landscape images taken by Google Street View and by not putting in an appearance himself either as the author of an image or as an eyewitness, Rook highlights the meaning of the authorial and witness role in the production of photographic images.

JAKOB WEBER // IN PRESENT

Where were you when the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed in New York? The photo series 'In Present' by Jakob Weber could initially be described with this seemingly straightforward common denominator. Yet things become more complicated due to the question of perception and the multiple overlapping of different levels of reality. On the one hand, the individual's experience is primarily influenced by what we directly experience in person. On the other hand, however, we are awash with all types of news items that constantly seep into our daily lives from various media channels. Which news has which meaning for which individual and in which context, and what direct or indirect effect does this have on my personal life? These are clearly much more complex issues implied by Jakob Weber's work.

Josefine Raab