

For Stefanie Busch the “in between” is not only a succinct as well as eloquent title for a work situated between photography and film, in which she relates a journey undertaken through eastern Europe in a succession of images played back at accelerated rhythm. With this she simultaneously describes and endeavours a critical reflection on our complicated present in all of its facets, both scarred and thus characterised by upheavals, ruptures and crashes from on high, and which in any case no longer permits exact clarification and explanation. A vague and persistent “in between” arises, and Stefanie Busch is on its trail, but in the knowledge that she will never be able to capture or define it completely. And so her works, whether screenprints, film or transparency montages, always drawing upon an extensive archive of visual material, invariably communicate something of the dissolution and disappearance of apparently stable systems of order. The real representation does not interest Stefanie Busch. Even if it sometimes seems that in her ceaseless documenting and photographing, she would like to hold onto what has been seen and experienced. But it is through the unavoidable superimposition of subsequent images, be this in our memory or analogously in her working process, the original image is changed and ultimately disappears. Or better: in a developing, and in the last analysis open ended fiction, there are trace elements as well as reminiscences of the Real, which are stored in the manipulations of the artistic process and in our memory.

She also concerns herself with the juxtaposition or the succession of images in her most recent screen print series entitled “Stiller” begun in 2008. Here she composes apparently coincidental landscapes, housing estates, a home in the forest, a ruin or an exotic plant, which – when they are viewed separately – show simple, even unspectacular visual motifs. But here they evolve into a multifarious, dynamic scenario, whose dramaturgy is directed by the artist. The ruin breaks the beauty of the landscape and the exotic agave plant springs out of the flow of images as if exploding. The reference in the title to Max Frisch’s novel “Stiller” published in 1954 points on the one hand towards questions about individual identity, to which the hero of the novel is also subjected. On the other hand she makes reference to the diary-like and fragmentary recollection of what has been experienced, for it is this which cannot be narrated with the means and in the sense of a simple story. So Busch’s series of images is constructed like a film trailer pieced together from separate units. Experiences are merely hinted at in a specific choreography of images and they imprint themselves separately on our memory. And whenever Stefanie Busch takes on the directing, one senses this uneasiness and a subliminal threat, proceeding from pictorial motifs which on the face of things appear harmless.

Stefanie Busch’s back-lit transparency montages – such as the “Suburbia” (2007) and “Closure” (2008) series – also consist of countless layers and superimpositions of separate pictures, which she extracts from her archive of images, cuts out as transparent sheets,

combines abstractly and places on top of one another on **perspex** glass. Due to the backlights shining through the display boxes, the images consisting of differing grey tones, now take on something of the appearance of film stills. The artist, who spent several years working as cinema projectionist, who is fascinated by the power of illusion in the cinema, here utilises the unreality of black and white and her subtle knowledge of the purposive dismantling of the image. It seems as if a projector has been stopped in the space between two camera stills, what is seen is caught up in a flicker. And just as sometimes in our perception, pictures are submerged by what follows, so memories can only be reconstituted from fragments, which now barely provide readable clarity, and thus can never be described exactly.

### On the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity

For her video work entitled "inbetween" (2007) Stefanie Busch brought over 7, 000 digital photo shots together, which came about during her numerous journeys in eastern Europe, setting this sequence to an upbeat sound track somewhere between Balkan folklore and dance, interspersed by the unexpectedly melancholic semitones of a cello. Such a document montaged in staccato gives a view into the rhythm of a pulsating life, referring at the same time to the dissolution of the former east European block in uncommented pictures without any frills, whereby an almost sentimental meditation recalls once important, and now no longer existent or even "practicable" ideals . At this point one is compelled to reminisce upon the artistic modes of expression and working processes of the romantics, who wandered whole landscapes, in essence plumbing the inner dimensions of the human soul. By way of their individual experience of nature such artists sounded the foundations and abysmal depths of their own selves, in order to ascertain that innermost, so-called landscape of the soul. Of central significance to the romantics were questions into one's own history and culture, for whose artistic translation they also chose to utilize the fragment, the sketch, the non-classical lyrical form or notes in the journal.

To equal measure one can also associate images from the classic road movie with this video work: the scenes which fly past cars being driven, unidentifiable landscapes beyond the tourist paths, everyday in nowhere land. But the easiness of Stefanie Busch's Easy Rider on the road appears to have been lost. This is the framework in which we can understand the play upon „some dance to remember, some dance to forget" used to title the image cycle in the context of the project "Melancholy and Euphoria" (CO.OP #01). One recalls a fascinating as well as troubling vital consciousness that never ceases swinging back and forth between the inseparable poles of desire for adventure and indifference. The text of the 1970's song classic "Hotel California" describes the experiences of a traveller who stumbles upon that peculiar hotel, which possesses such an unsettling attractive power. Whoever crosses the

threshold may depart at any moment he chooses, but can never really leave it behind him. And but a step further Kafka's castle looms into view.

In the summer of 2006 Stefanie Busch took part, together with a group of artists, architects, writers, filmmakers and curators, in the "Lost Highway Expedition" through the western Balkans, encountering all of the big cities in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia. This international research project posed questions into the radical economic, political and cultural changes within this disintegrated but newly forming part of Europe. During the journey not only did the aforementioned extensive photographic traveller's journal in digital images arise, but enduring networks to artists and other intellectuals were formed. But the journeys of the artist on the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity through former Yugoslavia do not just put cold research into the foreground, while she follows the trails of a merciless civil war. Her interest is tuned to the reasons why such a proud, independent country, the one-time utopia in its unification of different peoples, could have perished. Perhaps it is a search for broken identities and lost illusions which Stefanie Busch insistently follows. And the people in the former GDR state too, whose disintegration and demise she experienced as a child, were also subject to the crash of their social system with all of its consequences, and which now solidifies (in a post-socialist society most difficult to conceptualise) in her works too – between memory, forgetting and overcoming.

The photo series "Strange Matter" (2007/2008) is also fed from this photographic sketchbook. Strange matter is a real physical phenomenon, consisting of elementary particles containing a strange-quark but which cannot be found on our earth in stable, only in artificially energy enriched form; for this reason they are described as "strange" because they do not decay due to the same force with which they arose. In the series which refers to this concept from natural science, Stefanie Busch describes the decay of a multi-ethnic utopian community within a visionary, modern and emancipated state, caused by a "strange", difficult to comprehend, but none the less human force.

In 2006 she met with an apparently incomparable world during a scholarship spent in Cleveland, Ohio/USA. Here – in one of the centres of late-capitalistic heavy industry, which after Detroit is one of the poorest cities in the USA – she met unexpectedly with another model in which personal freedom and a sense of identity are preserved; a traditional immigrants town came into the locus of her attention, in which for example many eastern Europeans still live together today in diverse communities, preserving their traditional social patterns of behaviour beyond all reigning symptoms of cultural disintegration.

### The Utopia of Social Unity

The interest in social developments and appearances lead Stefanie Busch into an informally defined artists collective which calls itself "Social Unity". Together with her former fellow

students Jan Brokof, David Buob and Jenny Rosemeyer, who also studied at the College of Visual Art in Dresden, since 2006 she investigates in a playful manner the most complex human relationships in order to project this onto the smallest cell in society, namely the family. Here in the last analysis “the impossibility of “social unity”” (Susanne Altmann) is proven. In rented, real city dwellings the group set up a fictive family history, which has been continued as a sort of episodic novel. In this vein the life of a family of four was first related in Dresden (2006) and the failure of the relationships and the co-habitation of the mother and son, rife in conflicts, was subsequently narrated in Zwickau (2007). In navigable dramatisations, alienated in black and white, with scriptural, filmic, painterly as well as printed intrusions, the artists were able to “liberate” themselves from their respective authorship, so that they were no longer confined by having to act within their own label. Between the good life and the knowledge of its deeper lying despair, “Social Unity” operates in a highly artificial artistic dimension, which nevertheless is terrifyingly close to our reality.

#### Sugar-coated memories: people and landscapes

As early as 2005 Stefanie Busch’s work evidenced this subtle, both sociological and philosophical interest in human existence and – viewed methodically – in a descriptive recording, even archiving of particular personal states. Proceeding from her own image archive, and in turn referring to a monumental photo series by Gerhard Richter, she also called a long-term portrait series project “Atlas”; here friends and acquaintances “around the 30 something” she portrayed almost “neutrally”, objectively – without laughter, without emotional facial expression, with serious, and well-considered looks, staring frontally at the viewer. All of those portrayed are frozen in black and white, unreal and irritating. Here she also attempts to feel for the condition in between; youth is still palpable, but already the individuation of the adult being has begun. A no-longer and not-yet confound and underline being in search, but only gradually at first, of a new role to be filled.

Taking up the visual motifs of the romantics from an early stage the artist used the classical landscape image in her work just as equally as they had previously. Whether forest, plot of grass, mountainous landscape or the representation of a swarm of birds –she was already playing here with the motif of desire and on the other hand with the motif of the mysterious, and the enigmatic: such as in 2004 with the piece entitled “Isle”. In the palace in the Great Garden in Dresden she covered the windows – here one thinks of Hitchcock – with transparencies depicting swarms of birds, which suddenly became lively due to the penetrating beams of sunlight and the play of light and shadows caused, in this way turning beautiful but at the same time threatening.

The non-realistic black and white means that her landscapes can only apparently be places of retreat. Already in her early mountain landscapes one can sense the coldness of the

natural elements and an undefined panic, lurking in wait for the observer behind the supposedly reliable idyll.

She had already cultivated this game of irritations a year earlier in 2003 with the work "Glade", a transparency montage on glass shown in the Galerie Baer in Dresden Neustadt. The covered gallery windows seemed to reflect the opposite side of the street, idyllic mountain landscapes however, were reflected in the house facades.

In her degree show piece (2003) with the title "Sugar-coated memories" she took up the motif of the birch forest and seemingly unspoilt landscapes. The screen print method employed and the back-lit photo montages have an inherent filmic principle that was palpably extended in an accompanying super-8 film with diary-like clips from familiar, central European topography. Landscapes such as these, zoomed-in close, or out of focus as if taken looking out of a moving train, and always in distancing black and white, which is the apt "filter for memory" recalled, have been restituted but are present now as no more than lost places. We will never really be able to apprehend them.

"Social Unity" was the name of an exhibition project by Jan Brokof, David Buob, Stefanie Busch and Jenny Rosemeyer. With the help of domestic objects hinted at, altered and exaggerated interior situations, minute details, films and noises, social entanglements, relationships, desires and deficits within the smallest social unity of the family, were represented in differing rooms and questioned into. Their aim is the artificial simulation of the dwellings and the atmospheric surroundings of a family including all of its personalized objects. To this end the artists work in black, white and all the grey tones in order to estrange us from a given reality and to act quite free of any contemporary tendencies or stylistic epochs, thus to make unhindered contact with their own memories and conceptions. In "Social Unity" definite authorship by the four artists is veiled. This format has already been realised in Dresden and Zwickau. In this context the artists do not dramatise a linear story about the family, but instead show a fictionalisation of familial relations beyond time and space.

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