

Leslie

Rudolf Steckholzer

Opening: 20.04.18

Exhibition: 21.04.18 – 18.05.18

“Callaway great big bertha epic gbb jailbreak technology” is a portrait of a golfer. Every part of the dynamic composition evokes the impression of motion captured in perfect stillness: The energetic twist of the golfer’s agile body; the tail of orange pigment engulfing her. And yet, there is something off about this image. The golfer’s body posture, the strange marble backdrop, the trajectory of the pigment trail... The illusion doesn’t quite play out.

Proficient in reading images as we are today, we are well aware of photography’s deceptive powers. Notably, the logic errors built into Rudolf Steckholzer’s images never deflate their immersive allure. Our eyes are surprisingly quick to pick up on an entire pallet of synesthetic effects: The touch of a gentle ocean breeze (“knappe 8.8.16”), or the warmth of the first rays of sunlight (“Rike”).

Steckholzer’s photographs largely sustain the traditional parameters of his medium. Shot in infinity coves (featuring stock photo backdrops) his works conflate distinct image layers into an entirely synthetic reality. There is a level of artificiality, which is best achieved without Photoshop. Mimicking commercial photography’s elaborate illusionism, his photographs are images of hyper-real perfection. Each of them is reduced to a single motive unnaturally rich with detail. A high-resolution dream.

In the past forty years, artists have embarked on unravelling commercial photography’s artificial dreams. In 21<sup>st</sup> century art, this critical analysis – once initiated by the Pictures Generation – has been picked up by artists such as Christopher Williams, Elad Lassry, Penelope Umbrico, and Rudolf Steckholzer who share a common strategy of mimicking and subverting codes and tropes of stock photography. Designed to be vague enough to be universally relatable, stock photography reproduces a self-referential simulacrum of wealth, prestige (golfing, sailing), beauty and youth.

The simulacrum’s bubble, however – as Steckholzer’s images reveal – is surprisingly thin. In “Rike” it is the mere presence of an aged woman, which bursts the seductive narrative of the surfing scene, and exposes mass media’s tacit exclusion of an entire demographic. Things become yet more evident in “staras”. Against a polished, obsidian black backdrop a woman athlete performs a perfect side plank. As if by accident, one of the kinesiology tapes attached to her foot lifts the bottom of the infinity cove: A classic Brechtian effect, breaking the spell of immersion by dismantling the photo studio’s simplistic setup.

Due to its connection to the real, photography has had a fundamental impact on our notion of reality. Driven by the capitalist desire machine, commercial photography renders this connection highly problematic. Rudolf Steckholzer’s images disrupt the perfect illusion suggested at first sight with a pinch of absurdity – and, not least, some comic relief.

Katharina Weinstock