

Kathrin Sonntag

Nothing is as it appears in Kathrin Sonntag's work. Her photographs, objets trouvés and films mostly presented in the context of installations address the conditions of perception, observation and cognition. The focus is on the moment when irritation creeps into what is supposedly familiar and long-known, when habitual ways of viewing and thinking are undermined and the mundane unfolds a magical and at times eerie potential. In doing so, Kathrin Sonntag plays with the paradoxical cultural history of photography, a medium that can depict "objective reality", on the one hand, and manipulate the reality of the image, on the other.

In her current show, Kathrin Sonntag stages subtle processes of mimicry, exchange, doubling, and reflection in an interplay of photography, film, and site-specific interventions. The starting point of all works was Kathrin Sonntag's stay in New York and the research she conducted there on aspects of perception in the world of magic. The "magical moment" factually taking place in the spectator's mind play a pivotal role. Magicians attract the audience's attention to then surprise them in the next moment. Kathrin Sonntag's visual plays with shapes and words between reality and fiction also trick the viewers' perception with a wink, who then observe themselves in the "act of seeing and understanding."

The 34-minute film „Sunset Park“ (2016) shows the view from Kathrin Sonntag's studio in Brooklyn from a fixed angle. In the distance one sees the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island, and in the foreground the piers of Gowanus Bay and the speeding cars on Gowanus Express Highway. The strong backlight makes the window frames appear as black silhouettes, just like the objects in the studio, including a vase, a hat, and a pipe. Accompanied by Kathrin Sonntag's voiceover, the video shows her placing color foils on the window, arranging objects, and making paper cuts. For example, the silhouette of a hat, a pipe, or scissors, that are successively added to the Mondrian-like basic composition and repeatedly repositioned. With a story interweaving personal experiences and thoughts on the essence of magic and the process of perception, the voiceover gradually captivates the viewers. At the same time, one sees how Kathrin Sonntag's rearrangements alter the

view to the outside world, vacillating as a "picture" between the painterly genres of abstraction, landscape painting, and self-portrait in the artist's studio, ultimately leading to an unexpected and surprising turn.

In a tongue-in-cheek homage to René Magritte's famous painting "La Trahison des Images" (The Treachery of Images) from 1929, which depicts a pipe but with the clarifying description "This is not a pipe," Kathrin Sonntag's exhibition repeatedly displays the motif of a pipe alongside a banana, a hat, and scissors. In a variant turned by 90 degrees as a silhouette on the gallery window and in an optical interplay with a large "spot" on the gallery floor, the form of the pipe becomes a question mark. Behind it one sees the photograph of a pine tree shot on the American prison island of Alcatraz, whose silhouette enters into a dialog with the spot and, as a "shadow of reality," develops an "exit strategy" from the image (or reality?). The "magical moment," which photographers often describe as the moment in the dark room when the motif becomes visible, is exposed in Kathrin Sonntag's photograph "Untitled" "before they eyes" of the viewer, so to speak. Doubled by the motif of the "artist in the studio," the "magical place" of artistic creativity, a mysterious atmosphere emerges against the objective character of the photograph with subtle references to the light and shadow painting of Jan Vermeer's self-portrait "The Art of Painting." The



Untitled, 2012
Inkjet print
75×78 cm

subtle interplay of light reflections and shadows is continued in the large gallery space, where it initially remains unclear whether the play with light is created by the patterns of color foil affixed to the gallery window. It is actually a second film that Kathrin Sonntag produced in her studio in New York showing the play with light caused by the foils and paper cuts applied there.

The triptych “Conversation Piece” plays with the idiosyncratic analogy of the shapes of two things that actually do not belong together. During the process of categorization, which is characteristic of perception, new contexts of meaning arise in a “dance-like” way and, of course, the question of whether the motif might have been manipulated worms its way into this humorous moment of irritation. This magical play of visual rhymes and the ensuing new and unexpected meaning is continued in Kathrin Sonntag’s “Atlas” series. Found and manipulated image material is set in a playful relation to her own motifs. Kathrin Sonntag releases the objects from their familiar function and stages them as protagonists of a “new narration.” The object-like feel of the photos created by folding alludes to the shape of a book, a picture atlas, in which the gaze of the viewer can “browse” endlessly. In a trenchant and poetic manner, the works question the extent to which our perception is pre-coded and capable of change, or, as Kathrin Sonntag says: “In my work I often play with everyday scenarios in which subtle shifts cause confusion. For me, it makes sense to start from what is familiar, because I am interested in moments in which one starts to visually stumble and check one’s own habitual perception. In this moment of hesitation lies the potential to look at something one has seen thousands of times in a new and unusual way.”

(Kathrin Sonntag 2015)



Atlas #5, 2016
Inkjet print
40×62 cm

Biographical note:

Kathrin Sonntag (DE 1981) has shown her works in numerous solo and group shows, most recently “Photo Poetics: An Anthology”, Guggenheim Museum New York (G), “Ray” Fotografie Forum Frankfurt am Main, MMK Frankfurt und Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt (G), Aspen Art Museum (S), Kunstverein Hamburg (S), Swiss Institute New York (S), and Schaustelle der Pinakothek der Moderne Munich. Her works are included in the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US, and the Pinakothek der Moderne Munich, among others.



Conversation Piece, 2012
3 parts, Inkjet prints
each 62×40 cm (overall dimension: 62×150 cm)

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