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FORUM 01 Elias Hassos – Paradigm

With its new exhibition series „Forum“, the Munich Photo Museum presents current positions of contemporary photography. Forming a prelude are works by Elias Hassos. Born in Munich, in 1968, he graduated from the Academy of Photo Design in Munich and has since been working as an independent photographer.

Elias Hassos takes photos of motives that are entirely unspectacular: a tree, a girl wearing a blue t-shirt, a door, an icy surface. His way of doing this seems functional and intellectual at first glance. His works, however, are marked by visual condensing – pointing to something more „beyond“ the surface shown.

With the exception of a few portraits taken as a longterm study, Elias Hassos develops individual photos that are linked together by a particular sort of interest: their common theme is „seeing“ – in the sense of conscious awareness of objects, people and phenomena.

Using various compositorial means something trivial that generally fails to catch the eye of the observer, is positioned in the picture in such a way that it generates a sphere of attention, inviting a closer look.

The subjects are often found in the centre of the picture, alone, in front of a neutral, light background – a procedure that takes the objects out of their ordinary context...allowing for a focus on the presented subject. The tree on a picture such as „Tree #3“ is no longer merely part of the embankment, but is given an independent significance by its setting.

Presented against a light background or a white wall, the imbalance between fragile trunk and luscious green treetop becomes evident. The photo transforms into an organic study of proportion that does not, however, remain on the formal-esthetic level, but emphasizes the peculiarity of the tree by depicting the soft whirring of its leaves in the backlit.

While the above is more about a new perspective on something seemingly familiar, his portraits of children and youngsters introduce „seeing“ as an obvious and direct topic. „Shino“, „Edward“ or „Lorenz“ are taken as half-length portraits centred in front of a light background, drawing the attention exclusively to the face.

They look straight into the camera, with a quiet, sometimes serious expression, returning the observer's gaze with their intense self-confident eyes.

This unusual eye contact – interestingly enough this can also be found in Hassos' photo of a sheep on a dyke – offers the possibility of a reflection on a principle owned by photography: looking at and being looked at.

Another group of photos is marked by a different principle of photography. Taken from above or as extreme close-ups, the entire plane is covered by an abstract all-over of patterns and structures. However, on looking more carefully and guided by captions such as „Fish“ or „Ice #1“, the pictures disclose their graphic content. A soft green space, covered by an asymmetric pattern of short dark lines reveals itself as a lake with small fish swimming in it. A grey-blue texture, covered by tiny white dots turns out to be a layer of ice.

These photos not so much depict nature itself but convey an idea of nature that needs to be deduced first-mentally and on a focal plane.

In photos like these the visual imagery of Elias Hassos is restrained. In contrast to this, a photo such as „Tree #2“ is characterized by a certain drama: Hassos took a flash photo against a night sky showing a leafless tree overgrown by mistletoe. The smooth trunk brightly reflecting the light; the white gleaming berries of the mistletoe in contrast to the deep black sky – the tree, in centre position once again, turns into a bizarre object of form. The flash –also used in the picture of pink tree blossoms or that of some bunches of reed –becomes a means of alienation for a reality that suddenly appears new and different to us.

The interesting, unusual or simply overlooked objects in ordinary life made visible – maybe it is this sensitization of awareness offered by Elias Hassos' works that turn his pictures into a „paradigm“

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