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Villa Grisebach Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Fantasies of Repetition
On Frauke Hänke's art and the echo of a text by Handke

Artists travel and absorb impressions. Artists photograph interesting motifs they discover. Artists collect. This is called gathering and preserving inspiration. Frauke Hänke studied photography and at the same time discovered an affinity for the gum bichromate print process, a print technique which gained popularity in the mid-19th century. She has travelled far, most recently to South America. She uses her travels to collect material for her art. Hänke herself describes the process she employs as follows: „Gumgraphy is a photographic process in which the positive material is covered with a photosensitive coating of gum arabic, chromium salt and color pigments. Drawing paper or fabric may be used as a base material. The material is first prepared with a gelatine solution that prevents the pigments from soaking into the fiber. A picture-sized negative is exposed by means of either daylight or a UV-lamp. The chromium salt disintegrates in the light and hardens the coating according to the intensity of the exposure. It is then developed in water, which removes the unexposed sections. It is also possible to influence the outcome by simple manipulation during the developing process. The first result is a positive which is very weak in shadow and tone. The picture attains a certain depth only by constant repetition of the process, in which the base material is once again coated with photosensitive emulsion, exposed and developed. The hue and color can be varied with each new layer of emulsion that is applied.“

Her magical, baffling, enchanting pictures and objects, which open the heart and heighten the mind, are the result of this involved procedure. The pigments and multiple exposures give the pictures an intense color, but as if that were not enough - whoever strolls among these enigmatic scenes must hesitate when suddenly confronted with the unexpected. It is not unusual to find writing integrated into a painting or picture. But embroidery on a photo is somewhat unique. Frauke Hänke embroiders words onto the pictures as an extenuated addition to the gumgraphy and its painterly constancy. The continuous treatment of the subject is reflected in the repetitious process of exposure and the additions created with the embroidery thread, shade upon shade and always following the hue. This embroidery is certainly not needlework in the true sense of the word, handed down as a model of a generations-old handicraft, but rather can be compared with the reworking of a print with brush and palette, in hand-colorization. The work is strengthened by the embroidered areas. This becomes obvious when the result manifests as contrast. The objects - cushions titled „Angenehmes Wohnen (Comfortable Living)“ - exude a sense of three-dimensionality manifested by the potted fern, for example, spreading itself out between beds, by the foliage framing a window or by the vase gracing a table. A shrill green enlivens the gray properties of the photos, whose origins stem from tourist brochures. Cut-out figures of white felt appear in the pictures of „Manténgase alerta a lo que sucede a su alrededor (Stay alert to what is going on around you)“. Frauke Hänke took the pictures in Patagonia and the figures are taken from brochures on the region. Distance is created when embroidery and photography merge colors with one another. Questions, proclamations and sentences, in a foreign language, taken from Spanish textbooks, brochures or signs are stretched across the sky, found on the horizon or on the street. These works are especially ambiguous when arranged in series. Not only is the monotonous color strange to the eye - in this day and age the eye reacts to an array of bright colors presented at once, in quick succession, animated, in zoom, in ways conceivable and inconceivable. The eye is prepared for anything, but not for the quiet, monochromatic color of the picture fields. Their density is cryptic and almost overwhelming for a gaze which is accustomed to quick, surface stimuli. Not only that; but a detail of the same photo has been shifted, minimally but recognizably, within a selected area of the picture. The eye sweeps from the first picture to the next, pauses, goes back, scrutinizes the third, the motif has been shifted again... no, it hasn't after all, and the observer is reassured. Standing in front of the fourth or fifth work of the series he believes he has again recognized the same detail. He is wrong, and so it continues. A feeling of uncertainty arises when regarding the series, always another angle of vision, sometimes barely noticeable and sometimes more than obvious. But Frauke Hänke's school of vision takes

the experience one step further and bestows the embroidery with a meandering life of its own. It traces an erratic path through space, at times beginning in one picture only to be completed in the next. It is necessary to read each picture one after another in order to decipher the message contained within, with the result, too, that the works of artists exhibiting alongside Frauke Hänke are examined with a sharper eye. The eye is drawn into the depths of the picture and moves among words, much as a scanner glides along a surface to absorb data. The embroidered sentences and panoramas form the work of art. Pictures and needlework. Whether it is writing stretched across a sky - much like a freeze frame of credits at the end of a film - or the slope of a mountain with an embroidered red line, a bit crooked, perhaps outlining an old mule-path... the message is not easy to understand. The picture and embroidery are open to interpretation and invite the visitor to embark on a wonderful, fantastic excursion. The scene's quiescence compels him to reflection. He walks by, stops, contemplates. „Why do I search for the writing or the picture from among the threshold? For yea, the threshold itself is writing and picture.“ (Peter Handke, *Fantasies of Repetition*)

Dr. Elke Ostländer, Villa Grisebach Gallery 2004