

Clara Kaufmann, 14.10.2021

Exhibition opening

Retreats **Esther Hagenmaier**
Alex Klein

"Retreats" is the title of this exhibition. I interpret the title as a reference to those inner spaces of retreat whose secret doors open to artists in the act of creating. They are spaces of absolute presence and simultaneous submersion, spaces in which one is completely cut off from the world and at the same time deeply connected to it. They offer retreat from the loudness of the world; one can find focus, depth, and concentration in them.

Of course, the exhibition title also alludes to the actual architectural space that plays an essential role in the work of both artists.

ESTHER HAGENMAIER

Esther Hagenmaier finds the source material for her works in already existing architectural spaces. The intensive exploration and in-depth study of the buildings ultimately lead Hagenmaier to her precisely composed photographs. The composition does not consist in the alteration of the found object, but in the precise choice of the visual axis, the perspective and above all the image detail. One could say that Hagenmaier creates optical spaces of retreat within existing architectures. She composes a new work from something that already exists - merely through her perspective. Through her subjective point of view, Esther Hagenmaier robs the depiction of real architecture of its logic and creates alternative spaces. In this way, she abstracts and subjectivises the visible reality and reduces the alleged objectivity of photography to absurdity.

The three-dimensional space is transferred in two-dimensional technique and cut in such a way that it seems like a non-representational illusion of the three-dimensional - one could almost be reminded of a reduced MC Escher in some of the pictures. A new spatial effect is created, a new object that no longer has much to do with the original space, although it is generated completely and exclusively from it.

In her pictures, architecture and the surrounding sky coalesce, space and surface grow together, and what is actually material unity is separated by immaterial shadow. The brain cannot interpret at first glance what the eyes see - the sense of sight is put to the test, familiar perspectives are abandoned. It takes a second or third look to sort out and decipher the photographic construction. Almost always, the first impression is not correct. Up is actually down, back is front, solid ground is immaterial shadow.

ALEX KLEIN

Alex Klein is concerned with seemingly simple, fundamental manifestations of the visible: surface and space, light and shadow. Klein wants to advance to the optical essence of such fundamental observations. He is not seeking to create a likeness or construct a perspective-correct space, but to deal with themes, such as the meeting of surfaces and colours: where does it take place and what happens in the process? What is a transition, an edge, a line? What gives a surface support? When does the surface become space? What is inside and what is outside? And what influence does light have on all this?

His fascination with daylight is also the reason why he deliberately avoids artificial light in his studio. The "whiteness" of his colour palette also comes from his intense involvement with natural light. Klein is not only fascinated by how the colours of his studio walls change depending on the daylight, but also those of his paintings. Alex Klein enhances this effect with an old-master technique that he uses in all his paintings: He "slurs" the colours. This means that he applies many different layers of paint on top of each other in a lengthy process and then grinds them off again to a greater or lesser extent each time after they have dried. Depending on the angle of incidence and brightness, the daylight then tickles out various nuances from the depths of the painting ground and can thus change the character of the work quite considerably in the course of a day.

In his work, interestingly enough, the reduction does not take place through the omission of layers of paint, for example - quite the opposite. The layering on top of each other is paradoxically tantamount to uncovering - as if with each new layer of paint something is not being covered up, but a veil is being lifted. With each layer, he gets closer to the essence of the picture, more and more the concentrate of what fascinates him emerges. Klein drills through his paintings until he has clarity at the end, when he reaches the last layer of paint. The picture is finished, this way and no other.

The works of Esther Hagenmaier and Alex Klein need time. Not only in their production, but also in their contemplation. They invite you to look, to really look at them. Shift down a gear, take a breath, arrive, look. Through their art, Alex Klein and Esther Hagenmaier encourage us to cultivate our own looking. They show us the wonderfulness of the everyday and the uniqueness of our own perspective. And perhaps they even open up an access to our own looking as an always available space of retreat.