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Introduction

The exhibition project *Archives, Re-Assemblances, and Surveys* does not strive to provide an overview of current Austrian art positions, which prevailingly, but not exclusively, use photography as a medium. Aside from the fact that national criteria can hardly yield a useful selection, the ambition at structuring an overview, considering that photography is a “turbulent, eventful zone” (Jean-François Lyotard), as I would also describe it, and has a long history of differentiation, is more than questionable. It is eventful because within photography there is not just visibility circulating, but also meaning and knowledge.

For this reason, photography is hardly ever a dispositive only of images; they are almost always surrounded and literally framed by rumours, communication, references, indications and above all stories, commentaries, texts, and history. The dispositive of images is not visual as such. “There is no authentic entity such as photography; there is just a number of practices and historical situations in which the photographic text is produced, brought into circulation and put to use”, writes Stuart Hall in the magazine *Ten 8* 1984. In that sense, all photographic investigations should revolve around the respective specific practices and situations where the photographic image appears and gets into circulation: as a vehicle, mark, note, indication, or placeholder for a void that possibly cannot be occupied either by knowledge or by the image itself.

“The images collide so that words can surface, the words collide so that images can appear, images and words collide so that thinking can find its place in the visual.” In that way Georges Didi-Huberman describes the circumstance that in the realm of photography knowledge, thinking, texts, images, and the visible collide. The photographic image does not reconcile these cultural

“techniques”, the viewing and the meaning. The visual field of an image is not characterised by entirety, homogeneity, and synthesis, but by conflicting orders, by the juxtaposition between the speakable and the visible (Michel Foucault). “The boundary between the two is a boundary common to both, establishing a relation between the two sides. This leads us to the conclusion that one never appears or takes place without the other.” (Gilles Deleuze)

Foucault’s strategy to keep open the gap between the language and the image and not to let one of the two come to realisation in the other also enables us not to understand the photographic representation as a visual sign, a certain “message” or even as a text, but to read it as a dialectic force field in which the visual revolves around the speakable and vice versa. What Foucault shows us is the impossibility to mark, describe, name or classify this wondrous region between word and image. Nevertheless, he insists that they are both related to each other along a borderline, which constitutes a non-fixable space between text and image. This boundary is not an outline of either the image or the text, but it runs equally through both as a gap or rift. “There are no visual media. All media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign-types.” (W.J.T. Mitchell)

For this reason, with the notions of archive, re-assemblance, and survey, the exhibition attempts to open an area in which photography in various ways appears as a heterogeneous action field, both as a document and a discourse element. No matter if Tatiana Lecomte finds her images in diverse archives and generates a new concatenation of images out of this heterogeneous archive; or if Michael Höpfner handles photography as a kind of a parallel practice on his extensive walking tours through almost inaccessible regions, which less documents his expeditions than translates them, decomposed into single scenes that don’t enable us to talk about

an authentic view or experience anymore; or if Krüger & Pardeller separate certain photographs from their scientific context, in this way showing research as an aesthetic practice as well; or if Six / Petritsch embed their photographic production into a kind of “measuring of the world”, as marks of the systematisation of their projects; or if Bitter / Weber search the political aspect of representation in the traces of political actions, describing this as coming-too-late and failure, to mention just a few of chosen positions and strategies.

In all these projects photography appears as a field of conflict between image regimes and image politics and contradicting systems of description. As a cultural practice, photography is a potentially endless area (of knowledge, experience, memory, and meaning), which—even using a current image notion based on the media multiplication of image production—still cannot be described as a purely visual order. In that sense, this exhibition follows the traces left not only by the visible (or converging in the visible), but also of the traces that emerge from the shift between image and text, the documentary and the conceptual, the visual and its meaning, between fiction and the materiality of representation.

This interest arose also thanks to the exhibition in the year 2013, *Zero Point of Meaning. Non-functional, Non-representational, Elementary, Experimental and Conceptual Photography in Croatia*, a joint project of the Institute for Art History, Zagreb, the Croatian Photographic Union, Zagreb, and Camera Austria, Graz. This pioneering presentation of photo-conceptual tendencies in Croatian art since the 1950s explored among other things also the question if it is at all justified to view certain art practices in formal regard (exclusively) through the medium of photography. This exhibition project has already shown that a complex blend of various—also media-related—points of departure

and practices has developed since, which surpass the issue of the visual in photography making it less prominent. The present exhibition is understood as some kind of resonance space, opened by *Zero Point of Meaning*. It can be described through a kind of scepticism, along the lines of the text by Maren Lübbke-Tidow: “The works on display are accompanied by a fundamental scepticism towards the multiple framing of photography as a technique of showing and viewing. They present in an almost seductive way—but by no means romantically—a kind of crisis of the photographic image that cannot be solved, because it is constitutively inscribed into it.”

And finally, this exhibition was also the starting point for a continuous and productive exchange between Camera Austria, the Institute of Art History and the Croatian Photographic Union in Zagreb, which led to this cooperation. We—Sandra Križić Roban and Reinhard Braun as curators of this project—want to thank Marina Viculin, Director of Klovičevi dvori Gallery in Zagreb for enabling us to show this exhibition in Zagreb. Without substantial support from The Arts Division of the Federal Chancellery of Austria its realisation would not be possible. We are greatly indebted to Gudrun Schreiber for her cooperation in partnership with the Federal Chancellery and her untiring engagement in the promotion of Austrian photography. Georg Lack of the Austrian Cultural Forum in Zagreb was one of the initiators of the project from its very beginning. He has also enabled us to show the exhibition in Osijek’s Museum of Visual Arts after its presentation in Zagreb. We would also like to thank the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, the Zagreb City Office for Education, Culture and Sports, and the Cultural Department of the Government of Styria for their financial support. Predrag Bosnar of the Croatian Photographic Union in Zagreb has once again had a major role in the organisation of the project – we are proud to celebrate with this project the 20th anniversary of the

annual photographic exhibitions of Croatian Photographic Union. As its secretary Predrag Bosnar was considerably shaping this series of exhibitions. Last but not least, we want to thank Ana Dana Beroš for her congenial transformation of our ideas into the exhibition display, Vanja Žanko for her continuous supervision of the project in Zagreb, and the team of Camera Austria.