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presents

More Light! Contemporary Positions of Abstract Photography

With works by

Inge Dick

Shirine Gill

Hubertus Hamm

Stefan Heyne

Marta Hoepffner

Joseph Minek

Regine Schumann

Jan Tichy

and others

Curated by Ralf Hanselle

Opening

Fri, 19. January 2018, 6–9pm

Duration

19 January – 10 March 2018

Venue

Galerie Kornfeld, Fasanenstrasse 26, D-10719 Berlin

Opening Hours

Tue–Sat, 11am–6pm

*“Open the second shutter so that more light may come in”
Last words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Dear Sir/Madam,

The history of photography is founded on a mythical basis: as in the Gospel of John, it seems as if, around the mid-19th century, the light shone in the darkness and, once again, the latter failed to seize the former. On 6 January 1839, the French newspaper “Gazette de France” reported on an invention that would “put to shame all theories about light and optics”. A few weeks before, the French painter Louis Daguerre had, by way of a “camera obscura”, succeeded in capturing sun light on a light-sensitive surface: one of the great revolutions of modernity. Henceforth, it was possible to materialize that which, on closer inspection, was in fact invisible: natural sunlight. It seemed as if all ideas about time, space, the world and reality had to be re-evaluated.

However, was that which the pioneers of photography had captured with their cameras really reality? In hindsight, almost two hundred years later, this may be doubted. Seven years before Daguerre’s discovery, a poet and naturalist had whispered a strange request in a darkened death chamber near the Frauenplan in Weimar: “More light!” These were the last words of the great “theologian of light” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. For more than thirty years, he had studied the nature of that same light that the pioneers of photography would soon turn into the instrument of their art. In his writings, Goethe had insisted, time and again, on the divine origin of this physical phenomenon. For the poet, light was not simply a product of electromagnetic radiation. In accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy, everything physical also contained the metaphysical, which meant that behind the light of the world, there shone an “original light” from eternity.

For a thinker like Goethe, no knowledge could be gained from dividing light into individual waves, particles or colours, as had been attempted by Isaac Newton and then later by Louis Daguerre himself. For the Universalist, all potential knowledge was already contained in the totality of light. In an 1800 letter to Friedrich Schiller, written against the Enlightenment’s spirit of vivisection, Goethe eulogized an earlier period, where “people only wanted to feel the moon”, whereas now they wanted to see and measure it.

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Goethe did not live to see the imminent advent of photography. One can only surmise how the “theologian of light” from Weimar would have responded to a technology that seemingly only continued the disenchantment of the world, by incessantly dissecting and anatomizing light and dividing nature into forms, objects and phenomena – into colours, areas and shades – into houses, people and landscapes. “Very often”, Goethe maintained, “figures only represent concepts. They are symbolic aids, hieroglyphs, transmission tools, which, by and by, come to supplant nature and impede real knowledge instead of increasing it.”

It is precisely at this point that the group exhibition “More Light!” wants to intervene, taking a step into the darkness in order to challenge prevalent prejudices. This group of eight international photo artists intends to lay down markers of light and to take a stand for the re-poeticisation of reality. Using a variety of abstract images, they no longer focus on individual phenomena of reality, but rather on “the whole of nature”. “More Light!” thereby becomes a cross-cultural and cross-generational search for Goethe’s metaphysical “original light”. The large-scale images by **Stefan Heyne** (born 1968 in Brandenburg), for example, represent a type of photography that wants to make do entirely without images. Heyne shows an eternity flooded with light, in which all symbols and forms have dissolved. **Hubertus Hamm** (*1950) and **Inge Dick** (*1941) take a similar approach. While Hamm observes refractions of light on corrugated mirrors, Dick, in her long-term projects based on minimal and concrete art, explores the way light changes in the course of several hours or even years. Conducting chemical experiments in a brightly lit darkroom, US photo artist **Joseph Minek** explores the foundations of photography’s materials and development processes. Minek does not use photosensitive paper to capture images of extra-photographic realities. His photos follow the tradition of Concrete Art, generating images that are immanent to the photographic process, using developers, toners and fixers. **Shirine Gill** (*1957), as well as the late **Marta Hoepffner**, who died in 2001, all try to wrest poetic forms from light. Gill creates symbols out of light beams – codes –, that appear on photo paper like letters or tags. With deceptive simplicity, she illustrates the visual, as well as the intellectual pleasure of seeing. Hoepffner, a former pupil of Willi Baumeister, created abstract compositions made from light. “Forms of light and shadow, as well as intermediary forms, can become the content of an image”. This was the creed of this extraordinary artist, a conviction deeply rooted in the avant-garde’s belief in light. The latter, finally, is **Jan Tichy**’s central theme. Born 1974 in Prague, the Chicago-based artist explores the work of the artist couple Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy on four photograms. These different photographic positions will be complemented and enriched by a fluorescent warm glow of light with a “Farbkörper” – a body of color –, by **Regine Schumann**, born 1961 in Cologne. Her work “Tower Rheinstetten”, a 2m high acrylic glass tower, is not only an examination of the expressive transformative power of light, it also stimulates the different themes of the exhibition and adds a sensual presence and plasticity.

Taken together, all of the positions in this exhibition create a poetic space, in which light is reclaimed as the essential subject of photography. As in Goethe’s thought, perception itself becomes theory. “The light is the light. And this light shines in the darkness and the darkness can finally seize it.”

Ralf Hanselle

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