

WUNDERCAMERA, Pitzhanger Manor Gallery & House, 22 Nov 2013 – 11 Jan 2014

Museum Clausum, Mark Dion, Jonathan Faiers, Patrick and Tristram Fetherstonhaugh, Andrew Grassie, Karl Grimes, Vid Ingelevics, Valery Katsuba, Karen Knorr, Louise Lawler, Stuart Leech/Dulwich Picture Gallery, Richard Ross, Traer Scott, Matt Stuart, Hiroshi Sugimoto. Curated by Museum Clausum.

The exhibition theme is the photography of museums. Around 100 works of 15 contemporary artists present a rich collection of images, thus immediately echoing the theme of collecting that is its subject. The resulting photographic 'museum of museums' provides an arresting visual experience as well as it puts forward a strong comment on museum culture, collecting, re-presentation and also the medium of photography.

There is an immediate hall of mirrors effect inherent in any photograph of a museum space as the museum is a form of re-presentation that is then re-presented in the photograph. When inside a museum, viewers usually focus on individual exhibits whereby the artificially curated set-up of the museum remains in a certain transparency. When looking at a photograph of a museum space we look at the whole space –as an image– and the artifice of the set-up is immediately exposed. This can work in different ways and to different effects:

For example 'perfect' reproductions of dioramas, such as those by Hiroshi Sugimoto or also Karl Grimes produce images that make the photographed set-up look more 'realistic' than it would appear when viewed in situ. As Sugimoto says himself: 'I made a curious discovery: the stuffed animals positioned before painted backdrops looked utterly fake, yet by taking a quick peek with one eye closed, all perspective vanished, and suddenly they looked very real. I'd found a way to see the world as a camera does. However fake the subject, once photographed, it's as good as real'.

To this should be added that 'a quick peek with one eye' and 'to see the world as a camera does', above all, means to edit out surroundings – it only looks as good as real if it is photographed in a manner that excludes all museum background. The selection of Richard Ross' images works directly opposed to that. Here exhibits are shown as distressed objects; museum spaces, including storerooms, are deliberately included in the frame. In a similar way, the works of Louise Lawler usually include museum space whereby Lawler uses the camera to deliberately fragment re-presented spaces as well as photographed exhibits. In both Ross and Lawler's works, the increased attention to the actual exhibition spaces also emphasizes the raw object-character and the materiality of the artworks.

Another effective case of fragmentation through crop and point of view is to be found in many of Vid Ingelevics photographs. His images combine fragmented 'peeks' into different adjacent spaces drawing attention to –and somewhat estranging– the architectural spaces themselves. More akin to the practice of 'closing one eye' Patrick and Tristram Fetherstonhaugh's images show cabinets at the Petrie Museum from a symmetrical 'objective' point of view, excluding surroundings yet allowing the uneven existing fluorescent lighting to leave its effects on the photographic image. Mark Dion's series 'Ursus Maritimus (II)' collates photographs of stuffed polar bears from different museums into a new collection. Matt Stuart's images 'freeze' moments of humorous visual correspondences between objects and visitors into a visual pun. Similarly, Traer Scott's images focus on reflections in the glass resulting in fleeting superimpositions of visitors and exhibits.

The juxtaposition of all these different approaches brings to attention that each photographer ultimately produces what could be called an 'intervention' of the camera. Another way of intervention is found in the photographs of Karen Knorr as well as Valery Katsuba who both set up juxtapositions in exhibition spaces –in order to be photographed– which result in images that thus reflect in a redoubled way on the cultural space that is the museum.

The theme of obsessive collecting, taxonomies and also multiple mediation is further addressed in Jonathan Faiers' *Thieves in the Temple*, which collates museum scenes from a large number of mainstream movies into a highly entertaining film montage.

Juxtaposed to these artist's responses is Vid Ingelevics' project *Camera Obscured*, which is a collection of historic museum 'in-house' photographs. These 'behind the scenes' images are different through their nature as having been made and used as pure 'documentation': photography is treated as a 'transparent' vehicle that records its subject, which is responsible for the fact that the photographer is often not even recorded. In a more direct way than the artists' responses, these images unmask museum stagecraft. The same is the case in Stuart Leech's (in house photographer of Dulwich Picture Gallery) time-lapse film that records the transformation of the gallery for a temporary exhibition.

The group exhibition in the gallery is complemented by the site-specific Museum Clausum installation *Now and Then* in the house. A collection of photographs taken at Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Field, photographically 'returns' part of the collection that has previously been housed at Pitzhanger. The video piece *Soane Time* suggests a time-warped live CCTV link to the Lincoln's Inn Fields museum. Whilst suggesting what Pitzhanger's remarkable Soane interiors would have looked when filled with his equally remarkable objects, the installation projects a strong sense of absence by referring to objects that are absent and moments that have passed.

The hall of mirrors effect inherent in this exhibition must also reflect on the medium of photography. Juxtaposing all these different approaches brings to attention that a photograph's style *adds* to its subject matter. From here, it becomes evident, that these different approaches don't just 'capture' but create and 'curate' compositions of different elements that are seen in the image. This shows that these photographically curated compositions are as artificial as the curatorial object compositions that are seen in the photographs. This is most directly addressed through Andrew Grassie's contribution, which appears to be a small photograph of a gallery space. Yet close inspection together with the information supplied by the label informs us that we are faced with a photo realist painting – of an exhibition set up that never existed.