

WUNDERCAMERA

This exhibition features around 100 works by 15 contemporary artists. In addition to the works in the main gallery, Jonathan Faiers' entertaining film montage 'Thieves in the Temple' plays in the Monks' Dining room, which is found on the way to the historic house, where Museum Clausum's 'Now and Then' is presented as a specific response to the Soane Rooms.

The rich collection of photographs of museum spaces immediately echoes the theme of collecting that is the subject of the images. Apart from the sumptuous visual experience this photographic 'museum of museums' puts forward a strong comment on museum culture, collecting, re-presentation and also the medium of photography itself.

One fact about the perception of photographic images of exhibition environments is that the viewer of the photographs is positioned on the outside and looks at the depicted museum space as an image. This is different to the actual museum visitor who, when inside an exhibition space, mainly focuses on individual exhibits and for whom the museum itself retains a certain degree of transparency.

In short, when visiting a museum viewers are more likely to focus on what the museum represents whereas looking at a photograph of an exhibition space brings to attention how the museum represents.

Camera Obscured

An increased attention to the artifice of exhibition spaces and the materiality of the exhibits is found in 'documentary' photographs that show an installation in progress, possibly with active museum workers in the frame. Interspersed throughout the exhibition is a collection of historic 'in-house' museum photographs. These images almost brutally point to the labour of artifice that is at work in museum displays. It is also interesting to note that museums often see these photographs as pure 'documentation' resulting in the fact that photographers are often not even credited and the actual photographs are not part of museums' inventory.

The images are a selection of Canadian artist Vid Ingelevic's project Camera Obscured, which was exhibited in 1997 at the Photographer's Gallery in London and then toured through a number of different museums. Ingelevics collated the images by writing to several museums asking for photographs from the museum archives. The prints on display are reprints that were sent to Ingelevics by the museums for the 1997 exhibition.

Karen Knorr

The exhibition begins with five images by the British artist Karen Knorr. These images have a special place in the exhibition as Knorr usually creates 'interventions' in museum spaces – in order to photograph these. The images here are from the series 'Connoisseurs' (1986-1988) which sets out to question notions of beauty, taste and

connoisseurship in British high culture. Knorr combines the images of the photographed interventions with image titles that further communicate her concerns and are incorporated into the works in form of brass labels.

Karen Knorr is an artist who has used photography throughout her career. A focus on museums has formed a constant core concern of her explorations of notions of high culture and its representation and perpetuation through cultural spaces.

Karen Knorr lives in London and works internationally.

Stuart Leech / Dulwich Picture Gallery

Similar to the 'behind the scenes' insights of the Camera Obscured photographs is this time-lapse film by Stuart Leech, who works as in-house photographer for the Dulwich Picture Gallery (England's first purpose-built public art gallery, designed by Sir John Soane). The film documents the scale of the massive efforts that went into the transformation of the gallery's permanent exhibition space for the temporary exhibition, 'Murillo & Justino de Neve: The Art of Friendship' that was held in early 2013. (The gallery's is also shown in Karen Knorr's image 'The Analysis of Beauty').

Stuart Leech lives and works in London.

Hiroshi Sugimoto

Hiroshi Sugimoto's series 'Chambers of Horrors' has been photographed in Madame Tussaud's in 1994 and shows four different dioramas that dramatise notorious historic British murder cases.

These 'perfect' reproductions of museum dioramas, (as also the images by Karl Grimes, opposite) produce images that make the photographed set-up look more 'realistic' if not to say 'hyper real' to how it would appear when viewed in-situ. As Sugimoto says himself: 'I made a curious discovery: the [prepared exhibits] 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'.

It 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 – the subject only looks as good as real if all hints of the museum background are excluded when photographed. Excluding museum space also reduces the effect of placing the viewer of the images as 'external' to the museum space.

Hiroshi Sugimoto lives in New York and works internationally.

Valery Katsuba

Like Karen Knorr's, Katsuba's images too present photographs of purposefully created temporary interventions in museum spaces. The images are extracted from the series 'Phiscultura', which explores ideas of human physical beauty and the culture around an idealised athletic body image. The posing of living athletes on plinths in direct comparison to classical sculptures or in spaces of high culture that would usually house such sculptures is a comment on ideas of perfection that cultural spaces perpetuate.

Valery Katsuba had the initial idea for the project 'Phiscultura' when looking at historic photographs of posing athletes and historic photographs are a general source of inspiration him. Katsuba lives and works between St Petersburg and London.

Karl Grimes

In the same manner as Sugimoto's 'Chambers of Horrors' images, Karl Grimes' photographs too exclude museum space resulting in a somewhat hyper-real representation of the images' subjects, in this case the wildlife dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

Grimes lives between Dublin and New York and works interbationally.

Traer Scott

In direct opposition to Grimes' hyper-real images, Traer Scott's series –whilst also showing wildlife dioramas– focuses on visitor's reflections in the glass resulting in fleeting superimpositions of (living) people and (dead) exhibits. The images are part of the series 'Natural History' which Scott photographed in several different museums. (Note that Grimes' 'Brown Bear' shows the same exhibit as Scott's 'Bears'.)

Photographs of exhibition spaces that show the presence of visitors also emphasise the time element, the moment of the 'taking' of the photograph. This temporality, immediately reflects on the shown exhibition space – the emphasis on the photographic moment also emphasises the temporality of the museum installation.

In addition, the human presence 'disturbs' the set-up as –in the image– it becomes a clear juxtaposition, whereas visitors in the spaces would usually 'blend out' the presence of fellow visitors.

Traer Scott lives and works in New York.

Matt Stuart

The presence of visitors is also the main subject of Matt Stuart's images (on the exhibition wall in the centre of the gallery). Here, moments of humorous visual correspondences between the modern art objects and visitors are caught in what could be called visual puns. The photographs are part of a larger series that was commissioned by the education department of Tate Modern in 2004. Matt Stuart lives and works in London.

Patrick and Tristram Fetherstonhaugh

More akin to the practice of 'closing one eye' Patrick and Tristram Fetherstonhaugh's diptych of large scale photographs show cabinets of the pottery collection at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London from a symmetrical 'objective' point of view, excluding surroundings yet allowing the ageing uneven fluorescent lighting to leave its colour cast on the photographic image. The life size prints allow for the study of intricate detail on the pottery dating from around 5,000 BC. The two images are from a series of 35 images entitled 'Lost and Found', showing all 35 existing cabinets. The photographs were taken – over a three-year period – with a custom-made camera set-up, constructed to allow the cabinets to be shot from a central symmetrical camera viewpoint despite the confined layout of the Museum. Patrick and Tristram Fetherstonhaugh live and work in London.

Mark Dion

Mark Dion's images distinctly include a label inside the main frame and are displayed in a grid, that clearly presents the framed images as objects of a collection. 'Ursus Maritimus (II)', makes most explicit what is at the core of all images included in Wundercamera: The act of inversion that makes the museum the passive and observed object of a new collection rather than being the active creator and presenter of collections and scientific taxidermies.

'Ursus Maritimus (II)' is part of a larger project which was published as a book under the same title in 1999. Dion is one of the artists in this exhibition whose work has been concerned consistently with museum and exhibition culture, though he usually works with sculptural installations rather than photography. Mark Dion lives in New York and works worldwide.

Louise Lawler

Louise Lawler has used photography to comment on exhibition culture throughout her career. Some of Lawler's photographs were also included in the now canonical

publication 'On the Museum's Ruins' (1993), a series of essays by Douglas Crimp that was one of the early texts that started a new way of thinking about museums and the way museums classify and present knowledge as fact. Lawler's photographs comment on the representation of artworks in museums, galleries and other contexts such as sales rooms or private homes. As in the three images here, Lawler often uses the camera to crop both objects and spaces. The opposite approach to Sugimoto's or Grimes' images, by showing artefacts 'incomplete' Lawler's images emphasise the objects' materiality over the subject matter they represent.

Lawler lives in New York and works internationally.

Richard Ross

Though less achieved through cropping, Richard Ross' photographs also emphasise the materiality of the artefacts: museum spaces, including cases and storerooms, are deliberately included in the frame but exhibits and museum furnishings are shown as distressed objects. The exhibition and its objects are shown as 'imperfect'. The images here are a small selection from Ross' extensive series 'Museology', which was exhibited in 1989 at the University Art Museum, Santa Barbara and at the same time published as a book with the same title by Aperture.

Richard Ross lives and works in Santa Barbara, California.

Vid Ingelevics

Another effective case of fragmentation through crop and point of view is to be found in Vid Ingelevics' photographs (opposite). His images combine partial 'peeks' into different adjacent spaces and also include fragments of human presence – in this case the museum guards. Instead of focusing on exhibits as a museum visitor would when inside the galleries, Ingelevics' photographs draw attention to –and somewhat estrange– the architectural spaces themselves.

These images are a small selection from the extensive series Between art & Art which Ingelevics photographed in various international museums.

Vid Ingelevics lives and works in Toronto, Canada.

Andrew Grassie

A question mark over the belief in the 'reality' of the photographic image is most directly addressed through Andrew Grassie's contribution, which appears to be a small photograph of a gallery space. Yet –as often the case in a museum context– the information supplied by the label informs us differently: we are faced with a photo realist painting – of an exhibition installation that never existed.

Andrew Grassie has specialised in these intricate photo realist paintings made in egg tempera. The motives he chooses for his paintings are mostly related to spaces of art exhibition, sometimes showing the stages of installation and often, as in the case of the work shown in the exhibition, fictional exhibitions.

In response to the theme of Wundercamera, and unique to Grassie's usual practice, he has reprinted two photographs that were used as studies for the painting.

Grassie lives and works in London.

THE HOUSE

Jonathan Faiers

Jonathan Faiers' highly entertaining film montage 'Thieves in the Temple' presents a large collection of excerpts of mainstream movies, featuring scenes that are set in museums. The result of a long somewhat obsessive research activity, Faiers subjects his collection of clips to newly created taxonomies.

Jonathan Faiers lives and works in London.

Museum Clausum

The group exhibition is complemented by the site-specific Museum Clausum installation 'Now and Then' in the manor house: A collection of photographs taken at Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields photographically 'returns' part of the collection that was previously housed at Fitzhanger Manor when it was in the ownership of the architect and collector.

The video 'Soane Time' suggests a time-warped live CCTV link to today's Soane Museum on Lincoln's Inn Fields. The transmission of the chimes of one of Soane's clock makes 'Soane Time' function as a clock itself to the otherwise empty Breakfast Room.

The photographs juxtapose two photographically distinct approaches, each in their own way corresponding to and complementing the unique Soane 'interiors'. The sumptuous all-sharp, crisp colour images allow for studying intricate details of the historic spaces yet, many images also feature more or less faint, ghost-like traces of visitors as a distinct vestige of the moment of the 'taking' of the photograph. The grainy black and white images show partial views of visitors on a par with the displayed object fragments. As a direct echo of Soane's collection, often aided by views that are additionally broken up through the architect's theatrical use of real and illusory spaces, the photographs repeat

fragmentation. The added focus on the fleeting presence of visitor's bodies emphasises the contemporary photographic moment in tensions to the stillness of the preserved historic spaces.

The fact that these spaces remain largely unchanged means that contemporary photographs could actually be 'historic' photographs, yet the Museum Clausum image titles 'stamp' a recent date on each image.

Whilst proposing an idea of what Pitzhanger's remarkable Soane interiors would have looked like when filled with his equally remarkable objects, the installation also projects a strong sense of absence by referring to objects that are no longer present and to moments that have passed.

Museum Clausum is the artist's pseudonym of Klaus Wehner. Working predominantly with photography and video, the museum –and the relationship between the museum and photography– has been a main focus of Wehner's work for several years and he has photographed in many international museums. Wundercamera is his first major curatorial project.

Exhibited in in the 'Soane Suite' of the actual house of Pitzhanger Manor, the installation Now and Then will photographically 'return' parts of Soane's collection, that was once assembled in these rooms and is now housed at Sir John Soane's Museum at Lincoln's Inn Fields. The video installation Soane Time will suggest a time warped 'life' link to the Soane Museum.

Wehner lives and works in London.