

In his "FilmStills" Donald Unter Ecker oscillates between both: the art of photography and of film assembly. "Filmmontage", Cinematic art: it is not.

At a closer look, large surfaces of a seemingly uniform appearance reveal a regular matrix of individual pictures. In following the direction of reading from left to right on the top row of these pictures, then row after row to the bottom, slight changes in the pictures become apparent. Initially, these changes appear to be only marginal when one single picture is being compared with one of its immediate neighbours. However, when being contemplated from some distance, the pictures assume their own structure and significance, thus condensing into some kind of a process.

In his series "Events Under Public Law," the artist employs a different technique. Here, he superimposes layers of continuous, individual shots - pictures taken from advertisements as well as of large crowds watching the fireworks at the traditional St. John's Festival of his native town of Mainz. Here, the close look reveals differentiated material, whereas seen from some distance, a colourfully structured agitated mass is all that presents itself to the viewer's eye.

The production process of the film pictures is created through the artist's precisely planned work arrangements. As a starting point, he may use a film recording of an object or an event in a particular environment. The artist employs varying techniques for such recordings on magnetic tape, e.g. the camera may be mounted on a tripod or the film may be taken in a continuous movement, etc. The data material of the magnetic tape is then transformed by computer, undergoing a workflow process of several stages until it is stored in individual digital image files. The artist selects only particular shots, e.g. every fifth or seventh, from the original quantity since otherwise the images would comprise too much data due to the normal sequence of 25 secs. for each film image. The selected individual images are now being continuously assembled into an integrated format and thus form a "FilmStill". After the stage of computer processing, the work is printed on film material in professional quality standard. Finally, the "FilmStills" are mounted on Plexiglas or on aluminium compound panels (also known as dibond panels).

Donald Unter Ecker realises a specific approach to artistic creation in each of his "FilmStills". Whether it is the particular plan of the work arrangements in each case, or the specific selection of the sequence of images, or the proportions of the surface that serves for assembly of the matrix of the images - all of these factors contribute to the general aesthetic effect of the final piece of work.

From the viewpoint of planned production, anticipation enters a zone of tension with the aesthetics of the coincidental. In the end, the result will always betray a "traditionalist's sense of beauty," as Jens Frederiksen has put it. The concise titles of the pieces or work (e.g. "Field Green," "Sky Blue," or "Rapeseed Field") have their own way of contributing to the "FilmStill" - experience: they open up vibrating fields of association to the viewer.

Any introduction to Donald Unter Ecker's "FilmStills" would seem incomplete without at least a sketchy attempt to localise them in the development of Modern Art. The precisely planned work arrangements may be reminiscent of the aesthetics of Concept Art. The stress on enhancing the viewer's perception of minimal changes may recall strategies introduced by Minimal Art and Radical Painting. Finally, one is reminded of the early experimentalist Eadweard Muybridge, who, as early as in 1827, documented the movements of animals and humans in sequences of serial images. By this approach, Muybridge became a protagonist of the aesthetics as well as of the technology of film. More importantly: his approach expanded photography by the dimension of time, as does Donald Unter Ecker's.