

Dirk Braeckman

7 April - 9 June 2018

Dirk Braeckman's third exhibition at Thomas Fischer includes a selection of works that stretches across several phases of the artist's work into the present, showing the artist's work as a coherent, large-scale oeuvre that cannot necessarily be located in any one, specific point in time, but, on the contrary, seems remote from time. This is what makes his photography so unique: no matter how mercilessly every photograph signifies a cut in the time of the respective present, these photographs go beyond time and assert themselves as images. Bringing together photographs taken at various points in time is essential to Dirk Braeckman's exhibition practice. Unlike the framework of the Venice Biennale in 2017, where he dominated the Belgian Pavilion through a strictly balanced system of hanging, for Dirk Braeckman the exhibition context of the gallery is something like an open area of experimentation. This is attested to by the decision to integrate an experimental film in the setting of images, thus combining various media and material.

Not only does the film material shown in the framework of the exhibition reveal a greater sensitivity towards the medium's materiality, Dirk Braeckman's large format, matte, usually black and white photographs, that hang without a frame and thus without protection in the exhibition space, emphasize their materiality in this form of presentation.

In so doing, Braeckman seeks a virtually physical link to the beholder.

Braeckman's photographs often are created almost by accident. Usually, he captures architectural details, the material quality of various surfaces and their structures, or light reflections and mirrorings: the texture of a stone, the weave of a fabric and its folds, streaks on a canvas, the porous membrane of the skin as a sensitive and yet resistant organ of the human body, light reflection on a water surface, or the play of light of a chandelier. All of these details can become worthy of an image. But for Braeckman, the actual work begins in the dark room. Here, he chooses from what has now become quite a large archive of negatives and treats or rather interacts with the material in the process of developing the pictures. The moment in which the analogue material undergoes a transformation, an irreversible recording of a trace of light, the moment in which the image, until then only latent, is given form an expression, is decisive for Dirk Braeckman. For here, he intervenes concretely and explores his leeway for compositional choices in ever new ways, often using the entire body: this explains the large format. There is a large range of possibilities when it comes to influencing the developing process. For example, by way of excessive and non-standard use of chemicals and developer fluid, or by paintbrushes, other brushes, and knives like a painter. But in trying out/resurrecting traditional-classical methods within the process of exposure, such as solarizations, Braeckman intervenes creatively in his material. Using all these techniques, he works on the surface structure of the photograph, which is shaped by depths and visual layers. With these depths and visual layers, Braeckman works toward an objecthood, in a certain sense leaving the two-dimensional character of the photographic image. It is a form of working that against the backdrop of a digital culture that is saturating everything, art as well, with which images are becoming ever flatter, is quite unique. Not just that, but the specific tonality of his images and their opacity results in a more closed visual surface that the viewer is forced to penetrate. In doing so, our vision slows: the beholder only gradually penetrates the deeper layers of the image. But then new spaces of visual experience open up.

Maren Lübbke-Tidow, translated by Brian Currid

Dirk Braeckman (born in 1958) lives in Ghent. He studied photography at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Ghent. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Le Bal, Paris, De Appel Arts Center, Amsterdam, S.M.A.K., Ghent, La Biennale di Venezia, 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice, BOZAR Center for Fine Arts, Brussels and Museum M, Leuven.

Galerie Thomas Fischer

Potsdamer Str. 77-87, Haus H
10785 Berlin +49 30 74 78 03 85
mail@galeriethomasfischer.de

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