

Dirk Braeckman

26 April - 15 June 2013

We tend to perceive images of the familiar, of things which appear immediately recognisable. In approaching Dirk Braeckman's oeuvre, the concept of Impression assumes a central role. As our eyes sweep fleetingly over the body of his work we see motifs such as a chandelier hanging over a patterned carpet, and which is reflected in a sliding door with wood veneer (P.H.-N.N.-11). A landscape with a house, blurred behind a glass panel (N.P.-P.G.-04). We see sofas and mattresses, draped with folded, geometrically patterned covers, mirrors, tiled bathrooms and corridors and wooden panels. In addition to the low contrast, the hard crop and the grain, common to all these works is a kind of veil, a filter which precludes closer observation and reinforces the notion of an impression.

Braeckman has always photographed using the same cameras, with the same focal depths. He subsequently has the film roll developed - often only to allow it to lie untouched and forgotten in his archives for many years before, if at all, finally subjecting it to processing. Thus he extricates the photographic print from the moment of its genesis: a situation which perhaps was prompted by a whim or an unconscious narrative. Over the past 20 years, Braeckman has in this manner assembled a vast trove of potential works from which he continually draws, often re-photographing his own prints and, in so doing, creating uncontrollable, infinite loops. The problematic term infinity is applicable here because the artist has not amassed an archive of negatives, meticulously classified according to date and location. Fundamentally for Braeckman, the negative does not possess the value of a document - since this would be tantamount to an inversion of the photographic rules: serving as proof is the print processed exclusively in the studio. Logically, the year concealed in the work's name also denotes its date of production.

Lying behind Braeckman's artistic perspective of the world and its images is never the endeavour to become the master of a given order. On the contrary: by intimating a potential threat, he assigns the things and images an unpredictability and arbitrariness. This is redolent of an almost childlike interpretation of Heidegger's concept of "being thrown into the world". However, in its conscious application it carries drastic implications for his photographic practice, since its rules are reversed: reality no longer presents itself as a passing flow of consecutive events which - as the genuine task of the photographic medium - are to be captured in the "fleeting moment", but as a surging, pulsating, seething mass which only through physical resistance can be organised with a sculptural gesture: in order to stem the flow.

When Braeckman photographs where he stands, this speaks not only to a certain physical posture, but also to a fundamental constant characterising his relationship to space. This is exemplified vividly by the narratives of the photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue, whose "childhood bedroom was his first darkroom, and the shaft of light filtering in from the closed window shutters his first lens." It is not only Braeckman's eyes which scan the surroundings, but rather his whole body which has become a camera.

Braeckman's works are continually balancing on the tight rope between disclosure and concealment, between enticement and rejection. They remain largely "provisional", as Braeckman himself states. From a distance, the work exploits its enigmatic valence, which is why it turns out so extremely haptic. Braeckman's images succeed in keeping the viewer at bay, but only in order to forge an uncontrollable opening from this disassociation.

- Excerpts from the essay "Sonar" by Martin Germann
published in: Dirk Braeckman, Roma Publications, 2011

Dirk Braeckman (born in 1958) lives in Ghent, Belgium. Recent solo exhibitions include de Appel arts center, Amsterdam; Fotohof Salzburg; Museum M, Leuven; and Kunsthalle Erfurt.

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