



Sebastian Stumpf - Îles sans nom
20 August - 24 September 2022

In *Îles sans nom*, Sebastian Stumpf combines photography and cartography. In a series of documentary black and white analogue photographs, rocks, large and small, can be seen without recognizable vegetation from a distance, variations of the same basic motif and a humorous play with the gaze off into the distance that is established in Western visual culture as both a perspective and a subject. The respective meteorological conditions and related light effects influence the contrasts in the images, developing the spectrum between black and white. The way light falls and is refracted creates shapes so that these rocks appear like sculptures off the coast of Brittany. They are sculptures in a minimalist landscape: the surface of the water reflects the sky iridescently, while the horizon remains empty. The images are always cut by the horizon.

The series of photographs is accompanied by an abstract nautical map that the artist reduced to the essentials, just like the photographs: we can make out the coastline, the positions of the rocks, and the route that the artist took in an ocean kayak with his camera. Stumpf has created a thematic map on which his trips can be charted. The in part jagged line reveals that it was sometimes quite exhausting or at least could have taken quite a bit of effort to reach and maintain the respective location where the photograph was shot.

It is impossible to find the respective stone formations in maps or images, nor do we know whether somebody was ever interested in them before: there are, for example, no indications of nautical travel. Instead, each rock is presented as terra incognita at the center of the image, photographed at a calm sea. To do so, Stumpf moved in a coastal area not fully surveyed and mapped by the maritime services of the French Navy. "I was surprised how large this 'undefined' space is," Stumpf says. This precise cartographic void makes the artist's map all the more interesting and the rocks become a field of projection for "the possibility of an island." According to Gloria Meynen, this possible island is not an existing one, but "a cultural technology of isolation and deviation." Deviant behavior can also be found in earlier works by Stumpf, which emerged in confrontation with urban architecture and infrastructure, as in a video projection filmed in Los Angeles that shows the artist floating down the Los Angeles River.

The second work *Towards a White Space*, a several-hour-long sound recording, also includes a map that provides information about the trip taken by bike from his Leipzig studio to the Berlin gallery. In this way, perception is directed away from conventional map information to the artist subject. We can hear the strained breathing of the artist while riding his bike and coincidental surrounding noise of the passing landscape. The physical effort is communicated acoustically, while the map, a line drawn from Leipzig to Berlin, does not reveal this aspect and the duration of the journey. This entry, also based on GPS data, provides once again what Lisa Parks calls a personal "movement signature." For a long time, the world's governments kept a monopoly on GPS data and mapping, but here they are used as a "technology of the self." The avoidance of any kind of conventional information and thus geographic orientation means that Stumpf activates the beholders, involving them in the work; with the audio work, this takes place once again in an immediate fashion, for the sense of hearing is less cognitively loaded, less language coded. Here, the exhaled breath containing CO₂ can be imagined as an ephemeral sculpture.

An ecological dimension is subtly present in both works, the artist travels in a climate-neutral fashion to the gallery, he observes islands that could disappear with rising ocean levels, even if in this case it is the natural phenomenon of the tides that makes the rocks visible and invisible at regular intervals. The act of disappearance is a theme that runs through Stumpf's work. Earlier works live off the tension between stepping into the image and leaving it again. Just as the conceptual artist Bruce Nauman does in interior spaces, Stumpf uses his body as a measure and a sculpture to situationally express the relationship between body and space.

In Stumpf's work in the past, the focus was on playfully, tactically demonstrating power or powerlessness vis-à-vis constructed urban surroundings. In his way, the artist confronts the beholders with the situation that they can almost physically perceive, or at least think themselves into it. You see yourself in relationship to your environment as large or small: this is a commentary on proportions and forces of attraction that are explored with the body. In his famous drawing of Vitruvian man, where he drew a circle and a square around the outstretched arms and legs, Leonardo da Vinci rendered the relationship of the body to the world as an expression of mathematical harmony. Stumpf comments on the lack of relation between bodies and the constructed environment with simple gestures.

Unlike his video and photo works of recent years, the artist himself remains absent in the new works, at least superficially on the visual level. The two exhibited works have in common the cartographic recording of a movement. In *Îles sans nom* we see the results of this movement, a kayak tour off the coast of Brittany in the form of a series of photographs. With the sound recording of something as essential as inhaling and exhaling, the artist is given a kind of hyper presence, in contrast to his video performances, which are shaped by conceptions of appearance and disappearance. In the current exhibition, Stumpf arranges the possibilities of absence and presence anew, he tests the relationship of body and movement, medium and space under changed conditions.

Vera Tollmann

Translation: Brian Currid

Sebastian Stumpf (b. 1980) lives in Leipzig.

Sebastian Stumpf studied with Timm Rautert at HGB Leipzig.

Solo exhibitions include: Mies van der Rohe Haus, Berlin, Kunsthaus Göttingen, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig, Kunsthalle Schweinfurt, Landesgalerie Linz. His works were shown at the Sixth Berlin Biennale and at numerous group shows, including Marta Herford, Kindl Berlin, Goethe-Institut Hong Kong, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Z33 (Hasselt, Belgium), Tokyo Wonder Site/Institute of Contemporary Art, and Onomatopee, Eindhoven.

For the new headquarters of Kulturstiftung des Bundes (Halle), Sebastian Stumpf created a site-specific video projection, and also created one for the new Kunsthaus Göttingen.

In 2017, Sebastian Stumpf was a fellow at Villa Aurora, Los Angeles, and in 2014 at Cité internationale des Arts, Paris.

Starting 30 September 2022, Hamburger Kunsthalle will be showing a work from the series *Towards a White Space* in their upcoming exhibition *Breathing*.

Galerie Thomas Fischer has been nominated for the VBKI-Preis Berliner Galerien for Sebastian Stumpf's exhibition *Îles sans nom*. The prize is awarded by the Verein Berliner Kaufleute und Industrieller (VBKI) together with Landesverband Berliner Galerien (lvbg).

Kindly supported by Centre d'art GwinZegal, Guingamp, France and Neustart Kultur, Stiftung Kunstfonds.

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