

Press Information

Andreas Mühe

June 7 – July 27, 2013

Opening: Thursday, June 6, 6 – 9 p.m.

Andreas Mühe stages images. The young artist's work is permeated by themes such as power, ideology, the past and vanity. Due to his own unique way of staging models, Mühe has already gained fame as a magazine photographer. Expertly positioned in their respective poses, they come to form as a part of the staged image, a part of the pictorial whole.

Gerhard Richter walks up and down in front of his own paintings, Paul Maenz poses alongside nude sculptures in porcelain white, and Friede Springer turns away and together with her guests looks reverently out of the window. This pose – the subject turning away from the camera – is one that is repeated throughout the artist's oeuvre. This exhibition focuses in particular on the Obersalzberg series, which the artist has been working on since 2010.

While they remain anonymous in the landscape images, in the pose studies the Nazis stand front-lit, dressed in uniform or naked. The poses, which seem to be full of tension, take their cue from original photographs from the Nazi period. Titles such as "Darges I 44" or "Dönitz 43" make unmistakable reference to the setting, while – impossible to define – exaggerating the staging. The number provides an indication of the year, in which the original photo was taken. In a near documentary fashion, Mühe deciphers contemporaneous documents and translates them into his own artistic vernacular. The man in uniform is faced with the same man standing naked in another image, meticulously positioned in the same pose. This juxtaposition of the dressed and the nude is already a familiar motif from fashion photography of the 1980s, a motif that Mühe subjects to reinterpretation here. The contraction of the muscles and this clear concentration on maintaining the perfect posture only becomes evident when the subject is disrobed. The studio constitutes both the space and backdrop at the same time. Dark, dismal and with a distorted cast shadow, it is reminiscent of the past. Like sculptures, untouchable, unmoving and close to completely removed from the world of the living, shrouded in the studio's artificial light the men appear almost lost. The representation of power is debunked and shown to be mere staging. Robbed of any drop of aggressiveness denoted by their status and temporally disconnected from past events, in Mühe's pictures the Nazis constitute an expression of failure from the outset.

The artist analytically reconstructs images of German history that had long since been banished from visual memory. His reference figure is Walter Frentz, a photographer who essentially shaped the public image of the Nazi regime. In a series of photographs he has his friends, whose names also function as the images' titles, slip in to the role of the Nazi criminal. While Walter Frentz barely had time to position his models, Mühe draws all attention to the

stylization of his protagonists. Oozing perfectionism, immaculate in uniform, wearing meticulously combed side partings, standing before the same red curtain, “Klemens”, “Patrik” and “Arne” show their faces.

Dense forests and high mountains, not to be conquered and ancient they occupy almost the entire pictorial space in Mühe’s landscape works. This combination of the landscapes – romantic, bordering on kitsch – with an officer or Nazi SS guardsman proves quite unsettling. Indeed the choice of location is grounded in history. Hitler and his close followers once used the Berchtesgarden landscape that surrounds the Obersalzberg as their private retreat. Against the landscape the people look minute, their faces turned away or unrecognizable. In contrast to German Romanticism, contemplation and reflection is transferred to the person alone. The figures are always positioned precisely at the center of the image; nature becomes nothing more than a backdrop and the staging pure spectacle.

Mühe stages the mysticism of the mountains with long exposure periods that span several hours. These specters of the past seem to leave their last traces in the surreal moonlight. What is left behind is a traumatized landscape which is not quite able to completely cast off its past.

Mühe captures his images using an analog large-format camera. The acute focus and brilliance, and something mystical is to be felt in it, is surely down to the choice of technology, if only in part. The size of the photographs – 4 x 5 inches – corresponds to the original format of the negatives used by his camera. Many of Mühe’s works are presented in series whereby their repetition reveals the uniformity of the content. A series of 20 small-format photographs, “Wandlitz” presents the homes of the once most powerful men in former East Germany. Uniform, transformed into the size of a doll’s house bereft of any character, in the images the houses have something rather surreal about them.

Mühe only shows female protagonists with their backs turned to the camera. The elaborately braided hair-dos were the true symbol of women in the Third Reich, who stood in the shadow of their husbands and fulfilled the traditional role of the woman. The tattoos correspond to the reality of independent women today and appear rather out of place juxtaposed to the braids. The jet-black background renders the body sculptural, almost haptic in its appearance and is evocative of portrait paintings by the Old Masters.

And it is precisely because one is unable to deny Andreas Mühe’s pictures of their aesthetic that they are so unsettling.

Andreas Mühe’s works have been exhibited at Kunsthalle Rostock, Hamburg’s Deichtorhallen and the NRW-Forum in Düsseldorf. He is the winner of several art prizes. Mühe (1979) lives and works in Berlin.

In autumn 2013, the Distanz Verlag will publish an extensive catalog to accompany Obersalzberg featuring texts by Luc Tuymans, Georg Hiller von Gaertringen, Matthias Struch and Karsten Ehlers.