

Theatre images in temporal and spatial totality

It began in the mid-nineties in Bielefeld with a passion for the theatre. Karen Stuke studied communication design at the renowned college there and finished with a diploma in photography under Gottfried Jaeger. In addition she attended the performances of the Bielefeld theatre where she interned in stage direction. At that time she produced her first theatre images with the aid of a *camera obscura*. ...

Theatre-employed photographers, who in general provide the photographic material needed for posters and flyers, produce mainly stills with long focal distances during rehearsals. The Berlin-based artist, however, has always been interested in the whole of the event – as a totality in time and space. In Bielefeld in 1995, for example, she decided to expose a whole performance with a modified camera in one single picture. Naturally such a long exposure does not allow the gestures and facial expressions of singers and actors to be recognized; instead their movements on the stage as well as the position of the protagonists within the course of action are only visible as streaks through almost infinitely superimposed and aggregated traces of movement. Consequently the images are also studies of the factor of time. It remains important for the photographer in the end not to be able to influence time. ...

Stuke's theatre images often juxtapose the static with the elusive, or a stable structure with the amorphous. And the fleeting amorphous can also consist of images projected on the back of the stage which, in a long exposure, are sometimes compounded into a just as indistinguishable layering as the persons in front of it, ...

Her enthusiasm for the two artistic media of expression, theatre and photography, is also evident in the use of the *camera obscura* because the cardboard boxes formally resemble a proscenium stage. Moreover, she presents the photographic prints in a deep frame, thus changing them on the exhibition wall into miniature stages.

Finally the two modes of expression, theatre and photography, are very well suited to each other for another reason: Both always confront us as spectators with an impenetrable and irritating mixture of reality and fiction (as well as their variations) which sometimes may swing one way or the other. With her staging of stagings Karen Stuke adopts a convincing, precise and subjective approach.

Dr. Matthias Harder