BALTS
projects

Exhibition: Philipp Schaerer

Press
Frida Grahn: Die Macht des Bildes In: archithese, blog, Zurich, 20 April 2016
English Version

The Power of the Image

The exhibition *Bildbauten* at the BALTSprojects Gallery appears, at first, to be a series of contemporary architectural photographs: monolithic and minimalist, with expressionistic sloped roofs. However, upon closer examination of the details, it becomes clear that Philipp Schaerer's images evoke a slight sense of cognitive dissonance.

Text: Frida Grahn – 20.4.2016

On the Photorealistic Aesthetic of *Bildbauten*
The series of digital image assemblages seems to come from the workshop of a modern-day Zeuxis of Heraclea (who was famous for his portrait of the beauty Helena based on the faces of five different models): a floor from here, a wall texture from there are collaged into a new composition.
Such seemingly abstract central perspectives, which depict neither people nor banal rain gutters, lack references to both time and place. The windows alone augment the level of detail present in the image: reality, once photographed, cut out, and transposed as «ready-made» pieces into the image, creates a more heightened sense of authenticity by including reflections and curtains. These make it clear that someone lives in this weird and wonderful house.
Interplay between realistic components and empty fictions lend the *Bildbauten* a distinct charisma that challenges our sense of perception. Subtle traces of digital craftsmanship indicate that it is not just a photograph. Even though the depictions are evocative of built works, they do not pretend to be reproductions of existing architectural structures.
This articulates the fact that implemented buildings are neither the goal nor the prerequisite for Philipp Schaerer's work. He is interested in the autonomous image: his works transcend the drawbacks of the physical world and triumph over the functional exigencies of reality.

Digital Impressionism
The exhibited works include not just collaged images, but renderings. Their results are no less interesting: the Paysages Numériques are analog natural scenes based on the raw material originating from the moving surface of a virtual photo studio. Reflected and preserved through by digital rendering, it is frozen into an image.
Through this process a pictorial alienation arises, like a reflection on the surface of the water reminiscent of Claude Monet's water lily pond. Its characteristics are only unmasked as digital «daubing» upon very close inspection. The described technique, according to Schaerer, is an attempt to bring a measure of coincidence and surprise into the otherwise so predictable digital world. The result is possibly more beautiful than its reality.

The Autonomy of the Architectural Image

Architecture also lives through its visualizations and depictions, placeholders for the finished and immovable corporeal wholes. Paradoxically, techniques of representation converge in contemporary times: photographs are retouched on the computer while renderings evoke the illusion of an authentic reality. These two media are thus further removed from concrete building. Quoting the second edition of H.S. Goodhart-Rendel's monograph, republished for this exhibition by these British architects: built projects represent a «regrettable but necessary» status between the «interesting» of architectural drawings and the «sublime» of photography.

Since only a fraction of architectural designs one day become actual objects, and construction in and of itself is an elaborate and expensive enterprise, it is worth reflecting on the autonomous value of architectural representation. Schaerer's works can be understood in this spirit: the architectural image is explored as a medium detached from the art of building. The basis for this digital world of magic is a constantly growing pool of raw visual material: a flood of information that Schaerer has become an expert in taming.

Despite each denial of an absolute correlation between visualizations and built architecture, achieved by ennobling the image and its assertion of autonomy, the question nevertheless remains whether or not the use of this visual medium can create new ideas and aesthetics in the designing of physical spaces.

Schaerer has worked as an architect and knowledge manager at the office of Herzog & de Meuron (2002–2006) as well as for the Chair of Computer-Aided Architectural Design at the ETH Zurich (2003–2008) as a senior staff member.

Reto Geiser created a second edition of the publication «Bildbauten. Philipp Schaerer» for this exhibition. The book can be purchased during BALTSprojects Gallery's opening hours.
The exhibition is open from April 16th – May 21st. The gallery hours are Thursdays and Fridays 14.00 – 18.00 and Saturdays from 12.00 – 17.00 or by appointment.

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