Angelika Richter

The Production of the Shadow (1)

Inga Kerber's artworks are based upon images of the everyday and of familiar things, whose most striking quality is their unspectacular and unassuming character. She selects her subjects and photographs them with a specific aim in mind. The fact that her chosen subjects frequently figure in the visual world of amateur photography makes her pictures appear rather clichéd. Inga Kerber places the pictures taken from her archive of small-format and medium-format analog photographs, digital prints, and copies (which she has been adding to for twenty years) into specific categories; strict groupings that correspond to traditional genres from art history, such as *flower bouquets*, *men, animals, landscape, plants, children, women,* and *theater*. She then processes the pictures by scanning them and printing them out in large format. The same motif appears either in triptych form or in a series of up to five pictures; in order to create each of these pictures, the motif is modified in barely noticeable ways by means of slight shifts in camera angle and picture field. By including the word "cliché" in the titles of all of her prints, Inga Kerber conflates all the meanings of the "cliché": a stereotype, a copy produced by means of a printing process, a copy of another sort, or a reproduction. Inga Kerber's artistic subject matter, her conceptual approach, and the genesis of her artworks all subtly reflect the manifold meaning and ambiguity inherent in the term "cliché."

But let us begin with the actual process of image creation. The loss of time by way of photograph's momentary character prompts Inga Kerber to occupy herself with the techniques and processes of image reproduction. By subjecting the pictures that she selects from her archive to a process of scanning and printing, using a particular printing technique, a process of image creation that is uncontrolled to some degree is guaranteed. Traces of reality are imprinted on the paper in a lasting way: flaws such as scratches, fingerprints, light incidence during scanning, fuzz and grid patterns. Sometimes these flaws already exist in the original photographic subject matter. However, the scanning

process gives these flaws an additional quality of alienation and goes a step further by making them into the actual subject of the pictures. In a final step, Inga Kerber produces her pictures as large-format pigment prints, in order to ensure maximum visibility for these “documents.” The duplication process brings with it an additional factor which is an essential part of Inga Kerber’s artistic process: coincidence. These deliberately uncontrolled signs of disruption within the pictures, which appear coincidentally, serve to heighten the picture that photography generally presents of our world, a world that is seen in excerpts and fragments. Different prints that show the same motif are never identical. Instead, the use of different printers, or of the same printer but with a greater or lesser interval of time in between the production of two prints, the use of different paper types and of different sizes of paper create delicate nuances and “shadings” of the individual pictures within a series. In particular, one is struck by the significant deviations in coloration and the diverging brightness/darkness values.

If one accepts Walter Benjamin’s argument, then the discipline of photography has especially lost its aura within modern art, because it is endlessly reproducible.(2) The effect produced by Inga Kerber’s artistic method is specifically not the loss of an artwork’s authenticity occasioned by technological reproduction processes that Benjamin complains of. Instead, her artistic method enables the emergence of a unique and original image. She sees reproduction techniques as a form of production and development process. She causes the copy—traditionally considered valueless in the fine arts—to undergo a transformation into an original artwork by means of a media-related yet individual image creation process. In addition to this, the interactions of temporal factors, specific intentions, and contingencies cause Inga Kerber’s images to lose their purely photographic character and generate a painterly quality. As in the case of painting, reality has been inscribed into these images by means of a slow process. The traces of the real that exist in the photographs themselves are heightened by the random nature of the marks that are inscribed into the pictures during the reproduction process. In this way, Inga Kerber’s pictures emphasize the vanishing of the dividing lines between the original and the copy, between the authentic and the non-authentic article. At the same time, her prints have been transformed into a storage medium; they have a

"memory." It is not that Inga Kerber deploys reproduction as a method of creating a cultural memory. Rather, she places a focus on the process of image creation itself, the inscription of the intentional and the unintentional in her pictorial worlds. On the one hand, her artworks postulate something authentically new: although they are generated from originally reproduced and scanned templates, her prints have the quality and the aura of an artwork; they display unique characteristics. On the other hand, her pictures, with their traces of reality, evoke the possibilities and the potential of the new.

The word "photography" derives from the Greek for "light writing." The intention behind Inga Kerber's images is diametrically opposed to this definition: they aim at darkening and shading. This is a desired effect, one that Kerber sometimes takes to an extreme degree through the use of technological reproduction processes. *(Cliché of a Half Nude Torso) I* (2010) shows a standing man, seen in profile. This series of three pictures shows the man merging more and more into the blackness of the image. In (*Cliché of a Palm Tree*) *I* (2009), only the exterior contours of a palm tree are shown against a blue sky, as if in silhouette—the palm itself is entirely black. In many of her "bouquet" series, Inga Kerber deploys the principle of veiling, of making the motif unrecognizable and of breaking it up. Her pictures sometimes verge on the abstract or on vanishing away altogether. If her motifs are sometimes vague and hard to recognize prior to printing, then they are only marginally present in the final artworks themselves. The layering of subsequently added shadows, of new tone values and of image flaws in the still life series—which already contains the theme of *vanitas* in the form of blossoming and wilting flowers—once again portray photography as the visual document of an arrested, recorded moment, stressing the way that photographs serve as witnesses to the changeability and impermanence of people and things.

Where light or light strips do appear in Inga Kerber's pictures, however, it is generally the result of something interfering with the duplication process. The artist does not use light to illuminate and to shine through her motifs, or to emphasize clarity and presence. Instead, light irradiates the subject of the photograph, entirely obliterating it in some areas just as the darkness does. The strong shadings and the over-lit, radiantly bright

areas of the picture could be seen as a metaphor for the impossibility of representing and illuminating reality by means of the photographic medium without simultaneously recording its incalculable factors, its blind spots and gaps. (…)

Notes:

(1) This text is an excerpt from the essay: "*The Manufacture of Visibility – On the Artworks of Franziska Jyrch, Inga Kerber, Oskar Schmidt, and Andrzej Steinbach"* written by Angelika Richter on the occasion of the Marion Ermer Preis 2013 Catalogue, argobooks Berlin, 2013.

(2) See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935–1938* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).