



Kaspar

Müller, Schätze der Erinnerung

2014–2015

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*Hey,
Kaspar. So,
to get started,
should we talk about travel
or about circulation?*

When it comes to these images of Lake Zürich, it's mainly a matter of place. A very specific place, of course. When you see the images in the show, you won't be in the same place, because they were all taken in Zürich, and the exhibition of the photos is in Berlin. The lake is portrayed in a number of photographs, unique moments

captured over the course of more than a year, over four seasons, in different weather conditions. I was walking around the lake, but I wouldn't call that traveling. I was walking in circles, and always returned to the same point. The show is called *Schätze der Erinnerung*, meaning "Treasures of Memory". Memories don't





arise until they've been reflected by

something, mostly something superficial, like a texture, a picture, a sound, an object, or a scent. It somehow might

include traveling on a metaphorical level. I want to use the lake and the pictures first of all as a vehicle. At first glance, these works have a potential that could be compared to that of postcards. It also makes a big difference whether you're familiar with the motif or the place, either

through a real experience or as an idea—though these photographs tend to create disconnect by preventing viewers from connecting with either the place or the author.

What about the form of the work?





Someone called the cardboard that

I glued the photos to
a passepartout—like the
matte around a framed
two-dimensional work—

a nice inversion. I like that idea because I understand the word as being French for “anything goes”. Of course, the photographs are the most important part. But the cardboard isn’t just a background; it’s what makes each piece an object. I used three different digital cameras in taking all these photos, so the white cardboard is

also an imitation of the white field you see when laying something out on the computer—when placing and moving the digital picture around on a blank virtual format. For me, it was important that these pictures be taken digitally and stored in a folder on my hard drive. There is no natural connection to the prints. It’s a translation.





Therefore, I wanted high-gloss

photo paper, to reference
'photographs' from the
darkroom. I think it's pretty
obvious that these aren't real

prints, they're just inkjet prints on glossy paper, imitating the now retro value of the material of real photos. Other older pictures of the lake that also look just like mine exist as 'real prints' in thousands of dusty old photo albums, not just in digital form on the web. No one takes the time to scan them, to digitalize them.

Analogue photography became a source of nostalgia characterized by the fetish of purity, chemistry, and materialism. But the analogue image is still what we think of when we think of a photograph. That's what most digital photos imitate when they're printed. My handling of the photos and the cardboards as transformed





Gomer

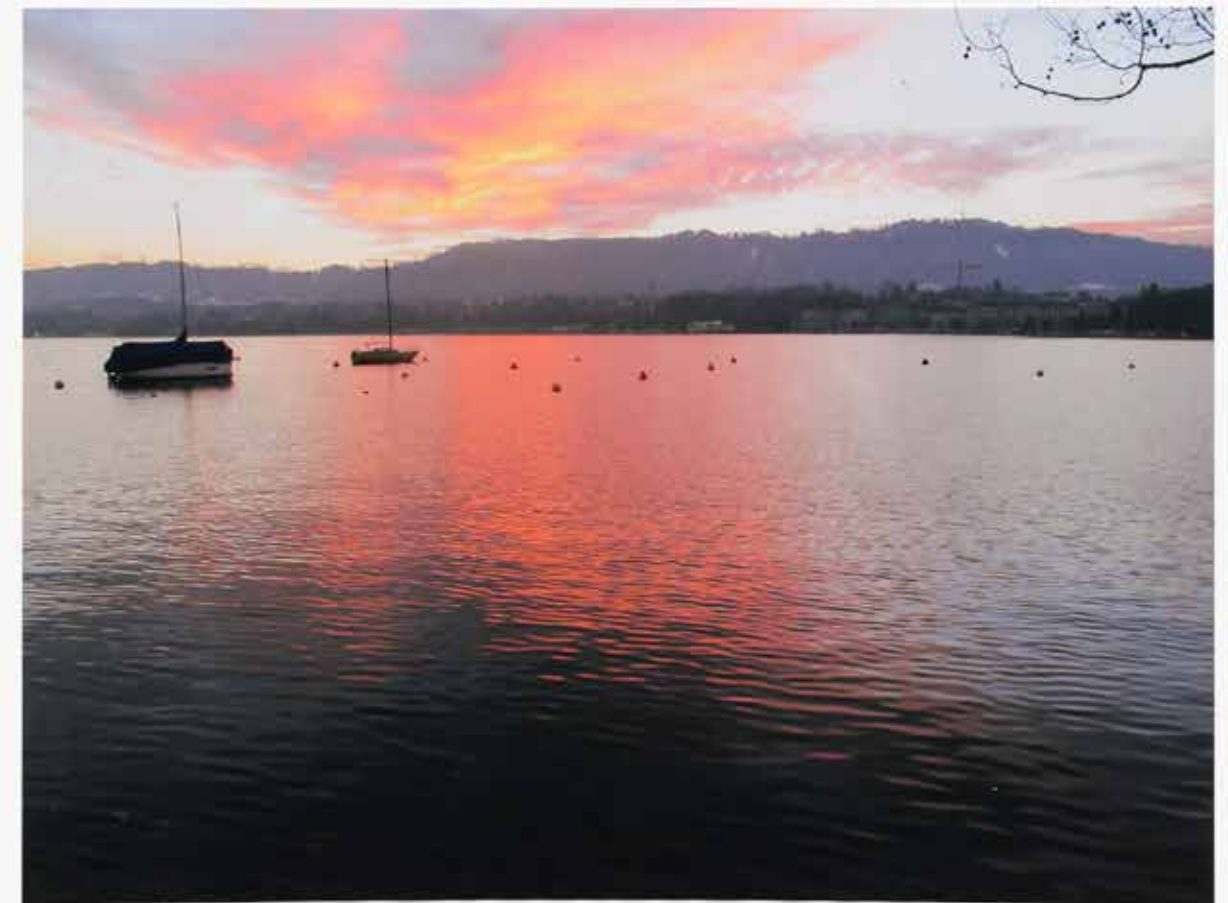
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material is direct and transparent.

I didn't want to mount the printed photographs, but rather glue them like a piece of paper. Sometimes they became quite

warped in the process. It's not affectionate, nor is it loveless. Maybe it's honest about its own rhetorical lies. I spent a lot of time taking these digital pictures, and after that, collecting and sorting them in folders on my desktop. The process of materializing the digital original was quick. I printed them out and glued them onto these piec-

es of cardboard, which I'd painted first with white wall paint. After that, I nailed each piece of cardboard directly to the wall and painted over the nail heads with wall paint. The pressure you feel when using a digital camera, that you might take a bad picture, is very minimal. You can just delete it if it looks bad on the





display.

Since smart- phones now

have great cameras too,
taking pictures isn't even worth
a thought. You just do it. Even
if it's not necessary, it couldn't

hurt. With this project, I was interested in an inflationary practice. I like how everyone is constantly taking pictures, and since these pictures often end up on social media, you can see that the motifs are usually very similar. There's nothing more specific and at the same time more generic than the lake in the richest and, at the moment,

most expensive city in the world. It's a specific localization and a picture of a lake.

Could you say something about these photos, which you're calling The Weather in Zürich—in relation to the film you've done in the past about Colmar and Strasbourg?





There's a parallel in terms of the idea of

the mise-en-scène of an existing place—using it as a readymade stage, not just in terms of the facades, but

also to avail oneself of its 'image' and the reputation of the place. But, as a stage, the lake is an 'empty' stage, a stage for the landscape first and foremost. In the photos of Lake Zürich, there is no narrator or guide measuring and mediating the place, as there is with the actor in the film *Colmar & Strasbourg*. The protagonist is the lake

itself, a piece of nature in the center of a highly developed civilization. Also, the photos are static, captured moments; nothing moves. In the film, motion is very important—not just as the medium, but also given the very slow flow of the actor on ships through the canals of Colmar and of Strasbourg, passing by the facades of





buildings.

Lake Zürich seems immo-

bile, heavy. The rivers in Colmar and Strasbourg never stay put; the water passes into the sea somewhere in

Holland. Lake Zürich is a basin; it stands still. The actor was wandering through places of conserved and mediated recollection and historicized education, instructed by audio guides, through a vain mock Atlantis, almost like a facade built after its own cliché. A touristy stage of colorful, trippy, half-timbered facades.

Whereas the touristic facades in Colmar and Strasbourg look damned and without real signs of life, the lake looks like a utopian place, a treasure island, a safe heaven where nature and civilization have developed a symbiotic relation. I know the trees on the hills around the lake in Zürich are being cultivated so that you





can't see beyond the city, can't see

the rest of the world beyond
the green fringe. A cultivated
utopia. Zürich is a very
strong and powerful place

and, compared to many of the other places I've been, it still seems like an exotic place. The lake is so clean, it's actually classified as drinking water. The lake also has a symbolic value, of course, as a basin that contains things under its reflecting surface that can't be seen. Thinking about the complacency of these

images, it's nice that the landscape and the sky are reflected on the surface of the lake. They're often divided by a horizontal line, almost mirroring that scene. Divided mainly into parts: the lake, the hilly horizon, and the sky.





*Hm,
reflecting,
reflected,
mirroring. Even if that mirrored
surface is impenetrable,
what might people read into
the simple fact of it?*

As you say, people will want to read something into it, even force some interpretation, because it's unacceptable for it to stop there. Only very hard-boiled reception would leave it there. The lake, for one thing, like a mirror, might stand for a desire. But the photos separate rather than connect spectator and author. It's

a ritual of severance, not cohesion. Before I come back to the mirroring, I want to mention the weather, which is very important for the images, also given the fact that it's reflected on the surface of the water. I paid a lot of attention to the weather. I tried to capture very different weather conditions. Almost like in the German Romantic





period, landscape and weather are

inseparable. When you look at these pretty pictures, you might assume there must be a dark potential. Or a twin

potential. That there must be another side. If not, the rejection of any depth would almost amount to aggression. Whenever one talks about Switzerland's dark side, that's when its landscape shines the brightest. It seems almost to express it in that way because it demands an equilibrium. I just read an interview where

Jean-Luc Godard talks about the Swiss landscape. He says that as the Swiss people have come to internalize the disreputable character of their country in relation to certain issues from the past and present, that has been turned outside again. It's the law of the *équilibre*. The landscape is there to clean that debt, and



Godard

assumes that

Swiss artists

and filmmakers always
see and portray the landscape
with a bad conscience.

He of course films it, though,

because it's beautiful.

*What kinds of changes do you think
occur when you combine images in the
form of a grid (even if it's just two images,
or an uneven grid)?*

With all these horizontal lines from the

lake, it's like adding up, stacking up.
Normally, when you bring two images
together, it's a confrontation. But because
the horizontal line is so strong and there
are so many photos of the same subject,
I think the gesture leads more to an
addition than to a confrontation. When you
look up images of Lake Zürich on the

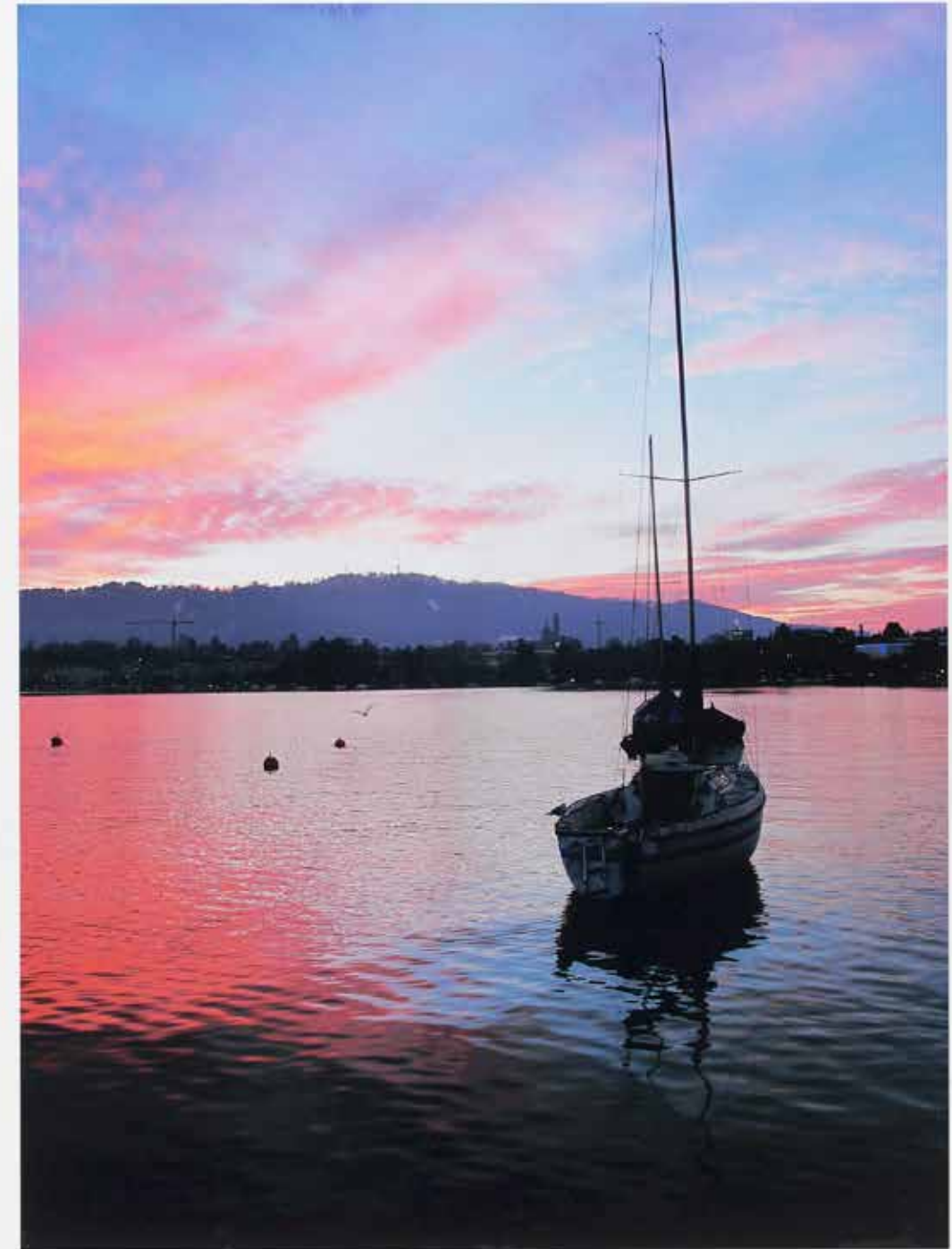


Internet, you'll find a lot of pictures

that look similar. So I've added my photos to a huge number of already existing photos of the lake. They contribute to or

follow a visual collective memory. Be it via flickr, Google, social media, or printed magazines. So with these images, it also begins to add up. We can only guess what the collective memory of an actual visit to Zürich would be like. And I wonder how diverse that would be. I always liked the idea of using lists (making lists)

as a means of comparing things. A list is always complete, regardless of whether you take something out or add something. With the grid and the amount of photos spread in the space, the focus in the comparison lies more in the differences than in the similarities, which is funny, because at first glance it all looks more or less





‘the same’.

And after a certain number

of pictures of the lake—
after yet another image—
the viewer probably
begins to feel indifferent

about it. It tends toward a beautiful
redundancy and oblivion. So, maybe
the dark side could be oblivion.





Illusion against Revolution

The pictures that made up the exhibition mostly show Lake Zürich. The lake marks a point of direction

as well as a destination. Looking out onto the surface of the water functions as a form of orientation, or as an illusion. The world doesn't end on a horizontal line but follows the revolution of our planet. The image of a body of water is also a pretty good metaphor for the simulacrum that is an object of art. It can be made to

fit any form, and it defines the container which makes up its outside to the same extent that it is represented by its full materiality. It is defined as much by itself as by where it sits. Considering that we are probably moving on foot, these pictures also represent a barricade, a limitation of sorts. The point where we are standing—





as these pictures suggest—

could be thought of as the
margin of the body that makes
up Lake Zürich; in return, it
partially marks the margin of

the body that is the city of Zürich. Looking at these pictures, we become aware of ourselves in an exhibition space. We look at these images while the objects that make them up look back at us. This creates a reversed situation: where we become the point of direction as well as a destination. The lake looks back at us;

the way we move (through the exhibition) becomes an orientation; this may emphasize the experience—of reality as whole—of an illusion. If these images of Lake Zürich make up the initial simulacrum, then in return, we are Lake Zürich to this simulacrum. This two-way street would soon drown in boredom, but the artist relieves





us with a simple trick. Many of the

pictures of Lake Zürich have
been paired or grouped with
other pictures of Lake Zürich,
and all of them have been

glued to pieces of white-painted card-
board, which effectively act as canvases.
The actual effect is a simulation of moving
images—time, basically. Considering the
title of the exhibition, Schätze der
Erinnerung, these points in time—Lake
Zürich in every season—suggest a relative
simultaneity of (indeed, boring) events.

The treasure doesn't lie in the past.
Memory is a contemporary experience.
Motion is not suggested as a linear
phenomena. It is paradoxically simulated
as one incident. This makes us the 'inertial
frame of reference'. In the sense of that
term, which comes from physics, we are in
a state of constant rectilinear motion with





respect
to one another,
and an acceler-
ometer moving with us would
detect zero acceleration.
That is how we can spin a yarn
about our consciousness.

It may seem coquettish, in light of that, to place an image of a—supposedly still—kinetic sculpture by Jean Tinguely among these pictures of Lake Zürich.





In the exhibition, the works were

*pretty much evenly spaced
along the walls of the gallery's
four rooms.*

Yes.

Could you say something about that?

I was thinking to create a cycle, but also to highlight the single prints as photographs, with some amount of affection for the details.

The hanging also stressed what they had in common through rigorous, obvious repetition.

It wasn't entirely an obsession with the lake yet, though it had the potential to tilt at windmills, to chase after something that maybe wasn't there.



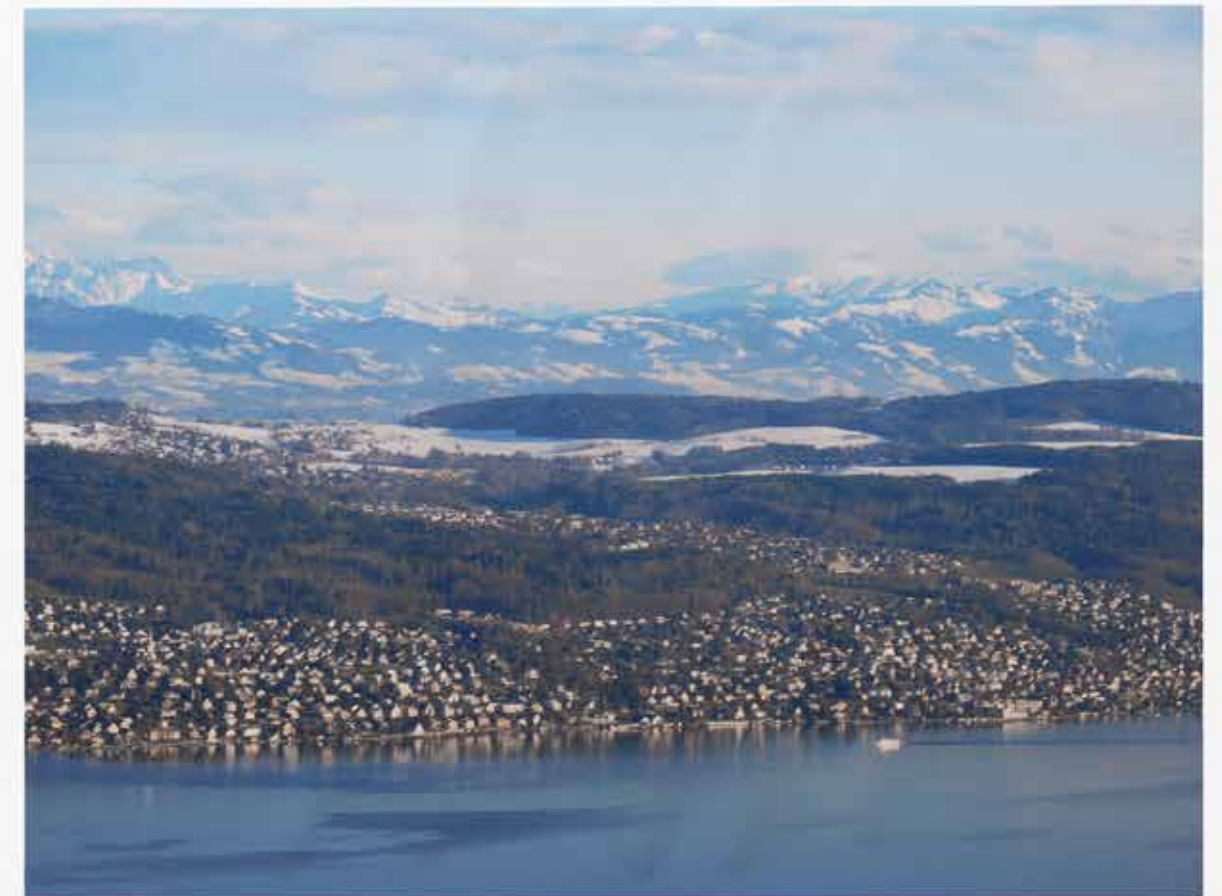


The ambition was so undeveloped

that the evenly spread
hanging indicated complacency
rather than obsession—as
a St. Petersburg hanging could,

for example. As it was, though the gallery is a pretty big space, some of the works from the series didn't make it into the show. It was never intended to be final. For the exhibition, I wanted the viewer to be surrounded by the lake at eye level. Wherever you looked, you saw the water stretch into the distance until it met the

opposite shore and the beginning of the horizon. Standing in the gallery was like standing on an island in the middle of the lake. What connects all the photos formally is the horizontal line of the shore—regardless of whether it connects them like an interrupted line, or whether two photos are stacked on top of one





another against the cardboard

backing. And, as Tenzing wrote, the lake was a form of orientation. As you walked from room to room, you went

from one part of the lake to another.

Maybe just to pick up where Tenzing left off: These photographs of Lake Zürich also, at times, depict boats and birds and houses.

Yes, that's true. It's not an abandoned

place. It's not post-apocalyptic. It's just set up very quiet and empty, spacious, naturally—with the lake's blank surface in the lower part of almost every picture.

But there aren't really any people.

It was as important to hide some subjects





as it was
to point some
out. A lot of
things have been hidden,
left out, left unrecognizable.
There are no people that
are more than what could be

called 'population' or 'statistics'. There's a man fishing; he's 'a fisherman'. The houses stand for 'civilization'. Obviously, people live there. And though they might sometimes look like models, it's pretty clear that they aren't models in miniature. I think it's always clear that there is life, and there are many signs of it. There are

many birds in the pictures; they indicate a healthy, livable environment. But the birds aren't the inhabitants of the place.

How did you decide what to show versus what not to show?

Like with the birds, it was about finding a





balance in relation to several other

details. But the process started when I took the pictures, so later it was just to choose which one got closest to what

I wanted. Sometimes I was surprised by what I got, but rarely. As I said, I used three different digital cameras, for aesthetic reasons, but also because that way, you take too many pictures anyway. But still I tried to set limits. I tried to balance the photos out as much as possible when I took the pictures, and by balance

I mean keeping them in balance for the sake of balance. You could say that balance is the root of evil, or at least boredom, but I think it's not only important, it's very intense. Because so many forces act on it. And I think that the mediocre, the average, the balanced—that's a really interesting subject for art, both aesthetically





and conceptually in relation

to contemporary culture.
After over a year of walking
in circles around the lake
with a camera in hand, I had

more than enough pictures to choose from, and there are plenty of other pictures that I could have just printed out and added. It was a process of allowing more than choosing.

Do you think the work exhibits some kind of restraint in the end?

A restraint concerning art and the artist, maybe. And as an idea, it's also a bit of a cul-de-sac. Tenzing was right when he wrote that the lake is also a form of limitation—not just when thinking of the photographer as a pedestrian walking around the edge of the lake. Of course, if you don't want to swim out into the





lake, that's a kind of physical

limitation. Although there are boats that can cross the lake, they stay in the water and don't dive below the surface. In the

case of Lake Zürich, these boats are constantly measuring the lake again and again in the name of leisure. They cruise around—not to travel from A to B—since all of these boats return to their starting point, the harbor or village or city where they started. That's a nice metaphor for the work and the oblivion that I talked about in

the first part of our conversation. Oblivion doesn't necessarily imply standstill. It rather implies continuous motion, movement toward a zero point, the process of squaring a circle.

Could you maybe say something about the exhibition's title, Schätze der Erinnerung?





These photographs might connect

to the memory of other images, images that have been taken around the lake by innumerable people over the years. Many of

those images made it onto the Internet, so you can find them on Google or in other image databanks. Certain views of the lake are closely linked to tourism and the way the city is represented in advertisements. In a way, I just added more of the same. The subject, the lake, isn't physically worn down by that process. In the photographs,

there aren't specific elements that could evoke a personal connection to whoever took the photograph—in this case, to me, to the memory I have of being there and taking the pictures. There isn't a single picture where something is happening that could be a shared experience between the viewer and photographer. It's





hard to connect with the photos.

Of course, we can't talk about the memory of the lake, or the memory of the landscape. There are only traces of human

interventions and cultivation. There's no chance of finding memories in these pictures in the same way that David Hemmings's character in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* found something in a photograph. In any case, I don't think you can see the 'crime'. Crime is a part of any world. But these photographs don't take responsi-

bility for anything. After all, why should memories contain treasures—whether they're memories of happiness, or horror, or are just insignificant? When I was in the exhibition with people after the show had opened, they definitely had different memories of the place. Some had been to Zürich before, some have never been,





others
had only
seen pictures,
and some had actually spent
part of their youth there
and had very specific memories
connected to certain places

pictured. But the photos always remain alien. For me too. I have memories of things that aren't depicted in the pictures, because I was there taking the photos. I think that's important: the memory of the photographer who took the pictures. It's not there. The images are cut off from everything that I did before or after taking

them, from what happened to the left of me, to the right of me, and behind me. From the walk there, the people, the atmosphere, all the things that can't be found in the photos. I think memory is more about what isn't shown. As I told you once about the really kitschy photo with the pink sunset and the boat calmly





anchored: I took it on a mid-summer

evening, and behind me
there were thousands of people
laughing, singing, playing
music, drinking, smoking. You

can't see that, and that's very powerful. The way that the camera imposes limitations is also the source of photography's potential. As the saying goes: What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over. Only the Internet pretends that you can see everything if you just look it up. But I don't want to squeeze too much

out of these images—or rather, squeeze too much into them. I think that's the temptation; that's the whole idea. As I said, it doesn't seem acceptable for them to stop there, for these to be just superficial images—whether you try to see something in them that isn't there or you feel provoked by the absence to a point of aggression.





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The problem isn't what you see

or don't see, it's what the
absence refers to. I feel these
images can go in any direction,
and every path ends in a

cul-de-sac. Be it dilettantish, artistic,
kitschy, nihilistic, polemical, documentary,
natural—the pictures, the lake, don't take
responsibility for any of these readings.
I find them attractive, but they don't invite
you to dive into a spiritual or aesthetic
daydream. They prevent you from doing
that.

*While preparing for the exhibition, you
made some shelves that are chromed and
covered in places with newsprint. But you
didn't end up including them.*

That's true. I decided not to include them
in the show. There's a parallel between
the photos and the shelves—also given

the title of the show— but they didn't

work in the exhibition. The shelves come from a work I first made in Milan at Federico Vavassori's space. In the

basement, I showed a junk room déjà vu with a rough and unassigned sense of responsibility for several pathological symptoms from recent contemporary art. Modified Billy IKEA shelves covered in places with feathers—where I combined two Zobernig icons, but also added other common materials: newspaper, chrome,

rhinestones. Then I sanded them down to make them look 'old', shabby chic, used. When I started with them in Berlin, I had already taken all the photos of the lake. The photo series was a long-term project that I mainly worked on outside the studio. The shelves were done in the studio. Maybe it was just a chronological feeling.

When

I brought the shelves to

the space, the photos were
already installed on the walls.
I wanted to try it out, but
they didn't support each other.

They suspected each other of sabotage. It was like each work distrusted the other as an artwork, and suddenly it looked like photographs and sculptures. The material of the painted cardboard, the way the photos were glued on, the way the pieces of cardboard were nailed to the walls with the nails then painted over again—all

these important details were overruled. The show became too illustrative in terms of production.

You'd used shelves before.

Yes, I did quite a lot of them before in different variations. I was always interested

in cabinets,
shelves,
and wardrobes,
because they're bound to
circumstantial human life, stuck
between necessary function
and representative architectural

form. While the form indicates a theoretical schema of historiography, they develop real signs of age. And, they're made to store things, to contain something. Their designs connect to certain time periods, and they're supposed to be witnesses to time, in terms of style or material wear. Of course, ever since this has been some-

thing people have paid attention to, style has been either real or fake. There have been imitations and homages, and now there is the 'shabby chic' look, which has become very popular, mainly in the upper middle class. I love the idea of making something look not just old or antique, but used, worn, or broken, as

a perverted
added value.
I'm mainly

interested in the surface.
That's where wear from time
and historiography are located.
I've used different methods

to try to indicate time and wear, to speed up the aging process chemically and mechanically.

Could you say something about how you work with layering—in terms of materials (chrome on shelves, feathers on shelves, rhinestones on paintings) and/or informa-

tion (blue filters applied to full-color images, hats used in various works in different formats over a period of time)?

You mention a good example. I put a blue filter in front of a series of photographs (film stills from *Colmar & Strasbourg*) and claimed that I'd put them under water.

Who's supposed to believe that?

But the blue can also represent water if you want. That claim is also just a kind of simple poetry. But I think it's important

to show that things aren't so special, so individual—as unique as advertising wants consumer culture's products and lifestyles to seem, like tools for individualization. Nothing of this is groundbreaking really. The big achievement made by culture today isn't difference and individuality—which is what's supposed to be accessible

through products, and especially through art—but rather standardization and consolidation.

Is that how you end up taking who knows how many photos of a lake instead of just getting them off the Internet?

10,000
photos
and counting.

