(con)temporary South Africa

In 2002 I took part in a residency program at The Bag Factory (affiliated to the Triangle Arts Trust) in Johannesburg for three months. A part of the time I was teaching photography at the Funda College of Art in Soweto. Most of the pictures were taken during projects with the students. (Con)temporary is a combination of temporary and coeval. It refers to different parts of my rather short stay and my photo project.
My focus was hawkers and spaza shops.

Aage Langhelle - From a post-colonial point of view

Perception is a complex process, not only in a physiological, but also in a political sense. In the age of post-colonialism the conditions of perception become even more complex. Here and now it becomes clear that such a thing as an innocent view does not exist any more. However, the search for the view of the guilty cannot result in a simple answer either, for the

post-colonial view includes the colonized as much as the colonizer. In sum, one could say there are four different perspectives: the colonizer's view of the colonized and vice versa, as well as each one's perception of him/herself. But anyone describing these perspectives will face a further problem, as the perception itself is also perceived. Aage Langhelle's work for the exhibition "rest in space" is a presentation of these conditions. The artist spent three months taking photographs in South Africa. As a white tourist he was immediately recognized as a foreigner whose camera was also regarded a threat. Aage Langhelle compensates this 'photographic assault' by presenting the photos in the frame of an installation. This installation is the reconstruction of an improvised market stall as they are to be found in many parts of Johannesburg. They serve to make a living for the South Africans who, after the end of apartheid, still live in poverty. The reconstruction of these shacks is not presented as an imitation, but as a kind of image which again includes further images - the mentioned photographs. The wooden beams that are used still show the price tags and look fresh and new. This is not a faithful reconstruction, as the very title of the work, '(con)temporary', shows, because contemporary becomes temporary, and thus opposes any claim for conservation. The temporary aspect of photography is identical with the temporary aspect of the installation, which furthermore refers to the temporary spazashops in South Africa. At the same time the construction of the space, of the installation, refers to the photographs' conceptual construction. For the view is not innocent, but Aage Langhelle adds notes to the pictures which explain and clarify the situation. Perception in the pictures meets with perception in the texts and is furthermore in dialogue with the perception of a reconstruction. Thus the view is refracted in itself and becomes reflected in a double meaning.
From a post-colonial point of view we may also learn that things are not as easy as they are presented in the media. George Monbiot writes

about Robert Mugabe in Süddeutsche Zeitung: ”The governments of the rich world do not like land-reforms. Because they require an intervention of the state which offends the god of the free market, and bother the big farmers as well as the companies they are supplying. Only because Britain refused to allow or finance an appropriate program of reform in Zimbabwe, political circumstances developed, which Mugabe is now so unscrupulously taking advantage of. The 'Lancaster House Agreement‘ transferred the state of Zimbabwe to the blacks, the nation, however, to the whites.”
Thomas Wulffen

Thomas Wulffen (1954-2023), Was a art critic and curator. Wrote among other for Kunstforum International, whose editor he was for several special issues. Lived in Berlin.

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