

L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht presents:

# Julian Faulhaber

## “LDPE – Lowdensitypolyethylene II”

November 14, 2008 to January 17th, 2009

You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening on Friday,  
November 14th, from 7 p.m.

The artist will be present.

We are presenting the second part of the series LDPE – Lowdensitypolyethylene. Since the last exhibition two years ago, Julian Faulhaber's work has developed further. He repeatedly contributed to the New York Times Magazine, and still this year his photographs will be shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as part of the exhibition Reality Check: Truth and Illusion in Contemporary Photography; the museum has purchased works for the collection.

### **Here Now: The Myth of Spectacular Photography** **Aaron Betsky**

Somewhere out there, twinkling in the distance, as a collection of vague shadows, too large to comprehend, too far away to see clearly, too complex to take in, a new world is rising. It exists only as an image, a mirage, a photograph. It is the subject of this publication, *Spectacular City*. It is also its content.

Architecture has always been split between the dirty daily practice of making buildings to serve those who have the money and power to commission such structures, and the desire to build a perfect world. This guilty conscience of the discipline has expressed itself in utopian schemes that then insinuate themselves into the practice as all those forms and spaces that make us aware of something other, larger, and more beautiful than the routine constructs in which we find ourselves. For the real version of Utopia, architects have had to turn to a succession of artists who could realize their dreams more fully: writers of (utopian fiction, painters of fantastic realms, science fiction film makers and now photographers.

Ironically, the latest wave of extra-architectural utopian imagery was born from a desire to document with great precision the reality around us. The typological emphasis on certain building types developed by Bernd and Hilla Becher in the 1960s, itself inspired by the work of August Sander, set several generations of photographers on the path to look long and hard at the cities they inhabited. Not content with what they found, they emptied their images out. They flattened, sharpened and then finally manipulated them with a variety of techniques to produce a reality that did not exist. They found within the surface of the photograph, but also within the banality of the everyday, a kind of Utopia.

At the same time, other photographers were picking up on the tradition of travel photography to view with awe the new cities rising in far-off places, documenting these very real castles in the air with the lush precision developed for glossy magazines or moulding them into sculptural reality in tones of black and white. They, too, found in the sheen of the photographic print and the glory of what they saw around them the possibility of creating another world.

“The possibility of Utopia has already been precluded”, the architect and critic Aldo Rossi once said. We can no longer believe in the construction of a perfect world because we have seen the totalitarian results of such visions and have learnt that we remain flesh and blood even in outer space. The architecture of the future is today to us as much a nightmare vision of dystopia as it is a dream of perfection. So, too, these photographs present us with a world that might be frightening and should be avoided. The difference is that the photographers hold onto the fiction of documenting through technology what exists, even if they manipulate their images or even build the worlds they show us in their studios. By claiming to show, rather than invent, they give us both the Utopia and the dystopia that is latent in our present day reality. To them, it is not a question of building reality and dreaming of something else, but of seeing the other world in ours.



“Tresen”, 2007, 117 x 150 cm





"Hinterausgang", 2007, 110 x 150 cm

This is the lesson we can learn from this spectacular work. It is the making of a myth about our modern, urban reality. A myth, after all, is not necessarily a fiction or fact. It is an imaginative and evocative retelling of a world that may have existed once, may exist in the future, or may be all around us today, waiting for the artist to make us aware of its existence. These artists show us the spectacle of urbanity as a myth of a life lived in a globalized, ever-changing, urban environment. They present a spectacular architecture that we may not yet have seen, but that they splay out in front of us as evidence in all its frightening glory. They are indeed not building, but photographing the future.

### The Image and Its Double Emiliano Gandolfi

*In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.* – Guy Debord<sup>(1)</sup>

Spectacle, according to Guy Debord, is the evident manifestation of the modern age, a period when the essence of things is only a distant echo of their outer appearance. Debord foresaw this evolution of our perception and was one of the first to understand just how substantial visual culture was set to become, not only in terms of advertising and political propaganda but in the definition of our culture itself. Compared with that of Charles Baudelaire's flâneur, our perception of the city is no longer a social and anthropological experience. It is a fleeting sequence of images framed



"Wand", 2007, 90 x 120 cm

by the window of a fast-moving car. This frame uncritically clips our view of things, stressing a two-dimensional perception of the city. Our imagery of urban life is so closely bound up with images derived from advertising, television and data transmission that it makes the city itself almost unrecognizable. Forty years after *La Société du Spectacle*, it is now obvious that the image has gained the upper hand: our age prefers the image to the thing, representation to reality: the image has acquired the character of reality.<sup>(2)</sup>

Architects are perfectly aware of this process; in the flow of images we are subjected to daily, architecture itself becomes a medium.<sup>(3)</sup> Influenced by digital systems of virtual representation as well as the language of advertising, architects see everything through a viewfinder and their design choices are influenced by the way photographers are going to frame the building in their photos. It now seems obvious that these days the best architecture is frequently not built but printed and admired in glossy pictures. Ultimately the architect is a manufacturer of 'inhabitable images': images in which people find pleasant accommodation, a comfortable workstation, a rapid and effective infrastructure. The architect uses images to win clients, but the images have nothing to do with any real experience of architecture – in fact they speak on a completely different level. The images are essentially embodiments of the architect's vision. In the field of art, as a consequence of this tendency, the focus of interest has become understanding spectacle, poring over its rules, studying its surface in search of the breach and the critical point. Never as in recent years has the city been the centre of interest of artists.<sup>(4)</sup> In particular, artists using photography as their medium commonly use the urban landscape as a palette from which they derive images and recompose them in interpretations and reflections on the significance of the images themselves. Their interests extend from the observation of emerging urban realities in Asia to the sprawl of suburbia, from a critical examination of our everyday habits to the atmospheric quality of anonymous buildings. In these works, photographers are not interested in revealing the changes to our urban landscape or the landmarks in it and they have no documentary purpose. Rather, they are engaged in creating and composing imagery, an interpretation, a vector capable of transforming the image itself. In the words of Francesco Jodice: 'These recent conditions have sharpened our ability to "perform" spaces and project our own will onto a context, effectively creating a landscape that exists as a projection of our own desires'. In a world of simulacra, the photographer today no longer produces images but visions, in which we recognize the authentic reflection of things. These visions leave an indelible mark on our interests and our way of seeing and experiencing spectacle; they teach us how to look and interpret.

Just like architects, photographers compose imagery for dwelling in. They blur the less important features, compose visual paradoxes digitally or construct a paper reality, in order to reveal the sense of the media image. These visions, tending to be detached and apolitical, are the most effective instrument we have for discovering the meaning of things and asking ourselves where we are going. In the words of Frits Gierstberg, these contemporary photographers 'are emphatically occupied, each in a different manner, with "photographing the future". Their photographs – actually digital photographic or video montages – should be considered design proposals. Nevertheless, these images yield no concrete building plans, but do make visual proposals that stimulate the mind and feed the debate over urban planning'.<sup>(5)</sup> Viewed in this way, the intent of *Spectacular City* is to understand, through the progressive changes in our urban landscape, what weight photographic images have in the evolution of our collective imagination.

## Urban Desert

In his contribution to this volume, Steven Jacobs argues that the rapid evolution of the metropolis has spurred a shift in the interest of artists; first of all by moving the objective from the use of public space, typical of *Street Photography*, to the structure of the city itself. Photographers are not interested in the swarming inhabitants of cities or their obsessions, but simply the signs they leave on the context, unequivocal traces of those same obsessions and habits. These photos are generally emptied of all human presence; at most, people make chance appearances in them or form an indistinct mass, their faces are never seen distinctly. The photographers' interests are primarily orientated towards the new developments in cities, the new conurbations, the business centers or infrastructures seen as intriguing urban sculptures. But in contrast with the 1970s, when artists like Ed Ruscha, Lewis Baltz and Dan Graham saw the outer city in terms of condemnation, now photographers accept its characteristics and perceive its aesthetic qualities.<sup>(6)</sup> These photographers, whom we could call 'Post-Doc(umentary) Photographers', are interested not so much in elucidating reality or protesting the direction it is now taking, as in creating visions in their imagery capable of embodying new aesthetic parameters or undermining earlier ones. At bottom, unlike the artists of the 1970s known for their participation in the *New Topographics*<sup>(7)</sup> exhibition, the Post-Doc Photographers feel a strong aesthetic attraction to new developments in the metropolis. Their work forms and disseminates a new aesthetic sensibility and a new ability to understand these spaces.

Apart from their interest in everyday subjects, the exhibition titled *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* held at Rochester in 1975, confirmed the influence of Bernd and Hilla Becher, the only European artists invited. In their photography – systematic cataloguing by frontal images of vernacular industrial buildings – the subject seems to become pure form. And with an almost scientific precision, they keep the industrial structures portrayed completely separate from their context. Apart from the formal quality of their work, the Bechers have become a point of reference for a whole generation of students at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where the teachers have also included Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter. Artists said to belong to the 'Becher-Schule', among them Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky and Thomas Ruff, differed in their interests and basic approaches, but they were all firmly opposed to the use of photography as an instrument of documentation. In particular, these three artists become in turn points of reference for the experiments of the years that followed and for what we are calling *Post-Doc Photography*.

[...]



"Tankstelle", 2008, 145 x 183,5 cm

## Images of Our Desire

In *Mobilité urbaine et theatre métropolitain*,<sup>(8)</sup> Jean-Françoise Chevrier describes the artist, in this case the nineteenth-century painter, as a fundamental agent of social change. Like the function of the *peintre d'histoire* in relation to the principles of the Ancien Regime, the *peintre de la vie moderne* is the partner of the Haussmannian city planner. Like his predecessor, he legitimately represents the history of the power of sovereignty. If this is true, one is moved to ask just what contribution contemporary photographers make to the aesthetics of our own age. *Spectacular City* does not seek to find an unambiguous solution to this question, but to stimulate reflection on the relationship between our imagery and the urban context. Today, as then, artists seem to embody the spirit of the age and represent, in its multitude of facets, the complexity of the contemporary urban context. Recent history confirms that the changed perception of beauty has slithered towards paths anticipated by various photographers. The fascination felt by such photographers as Bernd and Hilla Becher or Gabriele Basilico for industrial structures has instilled a widespread recognition of this aesthetic. It is not surprising that Zeche Zollverein (Essen), one of the largest industrial complexes in Europe, at present in ruins, is now commonly perceived as a monument.<sup>(9)</sup>

In the work of the Post-Doc Photographers, different perspectives seem to emerge. Though it is premature to establish which tendencies will prove enduring and which will truly bring about a change in our common sensibility, it is not surprising to find architecture inspired by infrastructures or the emergence of a new debate over the value of public spaces. In a society in which, according to Rem Koolhaas, 'images have become our true sex object, the object of our desire',<sup>(10)</sup> photographers are the best interpreters of our desires.



"Frosilos", 2008, 117 x 150 cm



"Automaten", 2007, 143 x 110 cm

- (1) Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1992 (1967), S. 15.
- (2) "The Spectacle has spread itself to the point, where it now permeates reality" Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, (Paris Editions Gallimard, 1988) S. 9
- (3) See Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994)
- (4) 'Somehow I see that architecture in a wider sense became the catalyst of the migration of the interest of artists into other fields and it seems to be the key example during the last few years' Daniel Birnbaum in conversation with the author, March 2005.
- (5) Fritz Gierstberg: *Documentary Now* (Rotterdam, NAI, Publisher, 2005)
- (6) Steven Jacobs, *Post Ex Sub Dis, Urban Fragmentations and Constructions* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003).
- (7) Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd und Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore and Henry Wessel Jr. were the artists of *New Topographic: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, 1975
- (8) Jean-Francois Chevrier, "Mobilité urbaine et théâtre métropolitain" *Les cahiers de la recherche architecturale*, no 41, 1997.
- (9) A similar case in Schouburgplein in Rotterdam, a square designed in 1991 by West 8 which clearly sought to represent the aesthetic of the docks.
- (10) Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monicelli Press, 1995).

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**Julian Faulhaber was born in 1975, he lives and works in Dortmund, Germany.**

## PREVIEW

### Exhibitions:

- Julian Faulhaber: "Reality Check: Truth and Illusion in Contemporary Photography", Metropolitan Museum, NY, 4. Nov. – 22. March 2009
- "J-Pop/G-Pop", CAS/Osaka, Japan, 29. Okt. – 19. Nov. 2008
- Liu Ding: "Construção/Desconstrução", Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, Brasil, Nov. 2008 – Jan. 2009
- "Go China", Groninger Museum, Niederlande, 23. March – 26. Oct. 2008
- "Avrum, Gold in der Zeitgenössischen Kunst", CentrePasqueArt, Biel, 14. Sept. – 30. Nov. 2008
- Ken Lum: "7th Gwangju Biennale", 5. Sept – 9. Nov. 2008

### Art fairs:

- ARCO: 11. - 16. Feb. 2009
- Art Cologne: 22. - 26. April 2009

### New books:

- Liu Ding: "Products", Publ. Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
- in "Young Chinese Artist", Ed. by Christoph Noe and Cordella Steiner, Publisher: Prestel
- Peter Bialobrzeski: "Lost in Transition", Hatje Cantz, Verlag

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