

Sven Johne

**Der Weg nach Eldorado**

04/26 – 06/01/2013

Utopia's potential in times of permanent crisis

Sven Johne's works playfully act on the accustomed manner of representation and readability. By combining takings of spheric simplicity with sober and reportlike narratives he implements ficitional elements in his works, taking their meaning beyond the purely documentary. Hereby he generates space for associations that are quintessential in fulfilling his aim: creating metaphors of being and conceiving alternative myths in times when global change and its impacts are penetrating the life of every individual.

The artist knows how to display language and image in an interacting way. His recent video work *Some Engels* bears witness to this complex correlation. The format might seem familiar to any ordinary television viewer: we are watching a casting situation where six German actors attempt to mime the sorrow-stricken Friedrich Engels, who is giving the eulogy for his friend Karl Marx. However, the speech turns out rather impersonal and appears to address the posterity, calling for defiance. Yet, even these words reflect Engels' doubts on the coerciveness of a world revolution. The original funeral oratory was held in English and dates back to 1883. Reciting it in leased premises located in the touristic and shopping area of West Berlin, the actors manage to reveal the various facets of the speech: farewell to a friend, mourning for the father of economics, legitimation attempt, militant legacy. But the modern setting does not lend credency to the eulogy, rather to the contrary. While every actor, in the hope of satisfying the American casting director, endures the ridicule of trying on Engels-beard, most performances fail due to the English language. As relevant and actual the content of the funeral oratory might be in our times of socio-economical transformations, the spectator cannot otherwise but smirking about the inherent comic.

The discrepancy between facts and their conveyance is a pivotal aspect of Johne's work, and it manifests itself also in the 37 pieces of his *Griechenland-Zyklus/Greek Cycle*. The sequence of pictures shows the star-spattered sky over such places as Delphi, the Olymp and Santorini. The artist took them during his visit of this country that appears to many as the scapegoat of the Euro-crisis. The comments below resemble excerpts of a travelogue. Or are they reports from locals? As so often in Johne's oeuvre, the fictional element comes into effect and the boundaries between individual case and society in total, document and prediction become blurred.

Neither the casting director, nor the traveller find an answer to their challenges. But the beholder still emerges as winner, that is if he invests time to track the traces between text and image that have been laid out by the artist. Even more: the associations with similar media material that arouse in the process of reading turn him into a fixture of Johne's central subject, which is the perspectivity of history and the historical narrative.

Sven Johne (\*1976 in Bergen) lives and works in Berlin. His works are part of numerous national and international collections. His photographs and videos were presented, among others, in MUDAM Luxembourg, Witte de With Rotterdam, MMK Frankfurt, Sprengel Museum Hannover, ARGOS Brussels. Coming exhibitions will follow at Camera Austria in Graz and at MoCA Taipei/Taiwan.