

Sven Johne

Greatest Show on Earth

11/04 – 17/12/2011

In his word-image-cycles, films and photographic work Sven Johne conflates ostensible documentary narration with an atmospheric selection of image material while turning his attention precisely to the essence of social phenomena. Little clippings or notes of the local press can function as trigger for his often-times cyclical body of work. Sven Johne arches in his topics from the failure of technology and piracy in modern seafaring to observations of personal failure under the efficiency pressure of today's globalized society up to the constructivity of history. Johne's background research and analysis of images and media coverage intersperse with own documentation and fictive new editing of the compiled material. Sven Johne manages to create an atmosphere in his works that sets questions of truth, authenticity and evidence to the background but challenges to deal with the actual current social status quo. Like denoted depictions of reality his works reach to the bottom of things and literally 'set the ball rolling' in their pointed fiction.

"In 1984, I went to the circus for the first time. It was a guest performance by the famous circus Probst, a magnificent show. had never seen such a thing before. Gravity seemed overcome here and wild animals were obedient and gentle. In 2011, this circus is touring again, from the beginning of March until mid-November. This is its 66th tour. This time the tour leads through all of East Germany, to more than 50 cities and villages, about 4,000 kilometers. I am going to follow this circus. I will travel to each city and each village – but only just after the big top has been packed up. I won't be there until the grounds are already empty again. (Sven Johne, February 2011)

The traditional image of the 'traveling circus' being connected to childhood memories and narratives by the parents – a time before the 'real life' – seems to be an anachronism. However, it can still mean the potential promise of 'happiness'. In his exhibition *Greatest Show on Earth* Sven Johne takes up this reference directly and develops it in the sense of a metaphor of existence. The 'Higher, Faster, Further' of the 'circus' system have become buzz words of a social mind set, whose lust for sensation, luxury and speculation benefits is more and more accompanied by a feeling of (inner) emptiness. Sven Johne traces this phenomena in his well concerted ensemble of new works, which are set into relation to each other like pictorial, reduced to the essential allegories. The photographed laconicism of abandoned circus sites (*Following the Circus*, 2011) intertwine with the eternal promise of pure gold (*El Dorado*, 2011) or the visual splendor of floribunda (*Roses from Africa*, 2011) that are transported with high logistic effort from the remotest parts of the world to in order to be only marketable in the short moment of their blossom. At the same time a compere in endless loop (*Greatest Show on Earth*, 2011) that announces one sensation after the other but who sets his audience rather at unease when listened to closely.

The works' special quality is their directness – developed without additional text or incisive visuality each one of them functions itself as trigger for a direct examination of their subject. Together they question in *Greatest Show on Earth* the quality of collective ideas. Do they inhere in their utopian potential at the same time the core for self-destruction and agony?

Sven Johne (born 1976 on Rügen lives and works in Berlin. His works are represented in numerous (inter-)national, public and private collections and have been recently exhibited at *Wunder*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; *Aschemünder/Sammlung Götz im Haus der Kunst*, Haus der Kunst, München; *Sven Johne. Elmenhorst, 2006. Tears of the Eyewitness*, 2009, Sprengel Museum, Hannover; *Brave New World*, MUDAM, Luxembourg; Sven Johne: *Reports between the Crack of Dawn*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt. In the upcoming months works by Sven Johne can be seen at a.o. *Schmitt-Rottluff-Stipendiaten*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; *Made in Germany II*, Sprengelmuseum, kestnergesellschaft and Hannover Kunstverein, as well as *RAY- Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/Rhein Main*; MMK, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Städel, DZ Bank et al.