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Stonehenge UFO

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Scopio Architecture, Art and Image

Utopia Vol.1 | publication year: 2023

ISSN: 1647-8274 [online]

DOI 10.24840/1647-8274_2023-0001_0001_11

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Abstract:

What embodies an artist's imperceptible tentacles and psychic antennae? How does the intangible materialize, and how does one reveal their innate ability to sense and intuit? For photographer James Smith, the answer lies in the choice of angle. His distinctive images aren't solely defined by the objects captured but by the angle's transformative power. Placed on flat fields, lawns, or derelict terrains, they confront wintry weather, save for one—a Guggenheim-like structure. Smith's angles imbue the images with both representation and orientation. They hint at secret locations on an eccentric map known to the artist alone. Time and space intertwine, blurring past and future. Smith's photography is evidence of the impossible, an enigmatic testimony that retains art's essence.

Alexander Garcia Düttmann has lived, since 1992, in San Francisco, New York, Melbourne, and London, and he has taught at Stanford University, The University of Essex, Monash University, New York University, Middlesex University, Goldsmiths College, and the Royal College of Art. Düttmann is an author with several seminal publications, e.g. "Participation: Awareness of Semblance" (Konstanz University Press, 2011) or "Naive Art: An Essay on Happiness" (August Verlag, 2012) and has translated some of Derrida's works into German, and Benjamin's essay on Julien Green into French. He has also edited "Theory and Practice", an unpublished seminar by Jacques Derrida on Marx (Editions Galilée, 2017). *What is Contemporary Art? On Political Ideology* (Konstanz University Press) appeared in 2017, *Love Machine. The Origin of the Work of Art* (Konstanz University Press) in 2018.

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James Smith, Temporal-Dislocation-002-Concrete Foundation

What is the visible embodiment of the artist's imperceptible tentacles? Of his psychic antennae? How does his feel for something materialise? How can he reveal his animal ability to sense, or to intuit, what is coming and what needs to be done? In the case of the photographer, the embodiment, the materialisation, the revelation must lie in his choice of angle. It is not so much the objects he captures, the objects built by an architect or arranged so as to create an architectural effect, that are distinctive of James Smith's images, though they do belong together, form a series on the grounds of a certain grey-brownish bulkiness. They are all firmly placed on the flat surface of a field, a lawn or a derelict industrial terrain. And they are all exposed to the wintry weather, with the exception of one object that looks like an abandoned Guggenheim. The coiling ramp of a multi-storey car-park is seen from within as it encircles an open, no less bleak space. A stony and grassy ring traced on the soil appears to be a sort of inner landing spot for vehicles gone astray. Yet rather than the objects themselves, what distinguishes Smith's images is the fact that because of the angle he chooses, whether focusing the camera on an object or displaying the photographs next to each other on a wall, they seem both to represent and to serve as devices of orientation. Perhaps Smith even turns the objects and the images into monuments of a former secret location, a location on a crazy map known to the artist alone. But the time is out of joint, as usual. The spatial coordinates are traversed by a temporal dislocation because it is impossible to decide whether the present moment, the seasonal and yet eternal now of the image, refers to a past buried in the artist's memory or to a future to be exhumed from times immemorial. When did, when will, the chariots of the gods land? Here, with a humour that is all the more eccentric the more its matter-of-factness proves unassailable, or the more it launches the empiricism of the dirt into the quirky turbulences of the skies, is the artist's visual evidence of the impossible. Will they really touch down in the middle? James Smith gives an answer to the old and exhausting question of what it is that makes photography an art form. For if art must always retain an enigmaticalness that can only be resolved at the cost of art coming to an end, an enigmaticalness factually established and not intentionally sought, then art is always addressed to the gods, not as an appeal or a message but rather as a testimony of what is the case in the world, as a photograph. The naive aspect of science fiction or fantasy consists in that it wants to photograph the addressees themselves. Each time the addressee is identified, art capitulates and becomes science fiction or fantasy, regardless of the genre attributed to a specific work. It is such ingenuousness that Smith refuses. His photographic landscape is entirely contained within itself and thereby unlocked, sensitive, alive.



