

Photography and Subjectivity (Basel, 30 Nov–2 Dec 23)

eikones - Zentrum für die Theorie und Geschichte des Bildes, Universität Basel und Kunstmuseum Basel, Nov 30–Dec 2, 2023

eikones.philhist.unibas.ch/de/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/event-details/photography-and-subjectivity-in-contemporary-art-and-media-practices/

Kristin Weber

"Photography and Subjectivity in Contemporary Art and Media Practices".

Susan Sontag famously grounded photography's ambivalent role of both expressing and controlling forms of human subjectivity in modern capitalist societies in its twin powers of generating "instrumental views" yielding "objective data" and at the same time producing "aesthetic views", with photographs acting as "items of psychological science fiction".

In the wake of the 1960ies, photography has become an integral part of various post-conceptual artistic practices dealing with problems of subjectivity and subjectivation, both with regard to content and a peculiar use of certain technological characteristics of the medium (point-of-view, stillness, cropping, depth of field, color properties like those of Polaroids etc.). In this regard, the human body has regained importance not only as a motif, but also in an operational sense (the body operating the camera or delegating certain tasks to the apparatus) and in its complex metaphorical and metonymical relations to the processes and materials of photography (the "body of the camera", the skin-like quality of certain photographic surfaces, tonalities of color etc.)

Over the past four decades, artists like Francesca Woodman, Cindy Sherman, Lucas Samaras, Carrie Mae Weems and Hannah Villiger, just to name a few, have been exploring the mediality of photographic self-portraiture, pushing it to and over its perceived limits. In their works, the body, and its most visible outer layer, the skin, interact with the surfaces of photographic pictures, yielding interesting and problematic figurations of inwardness, showing traces from the contact with the world and the production of the pictures themselves. Often in these works, the bodies' performances in front of the camera are manifestly related to or in close dialogue with other mediums and media, such as sculpture and film (in respect of photography's stillness) or, most recently, digital image generation and image recognition algorithms.

The focus of the conference lies on post-conceptual practices located on the margins between photography and other types of mediums and media. We are specifically interested in questions of (self-)staging, the body as a signifier of subjectivity (even in its absence on the level of motif), and the processuality of artistic practices as shaped by the technological and aesthetic characteristics of certain types of analogue and digital photography.

Program

Thursday, November 30 (at Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart)

18.15 – 19.45 Lecture by Tina M. Campt at Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart: «Carrie Mae Weems and the Afterlives of Images: A Visual Correspondence»

Friday, December 1 (at eikones)

08.30–09.00 Coffee

09.00–09.15 Welcome and Introduction

09.15–10.00 Heather Diack: "No Location without Meaning"

10.00–10.45 Aïcha Revellat: "At Arm's Length. Hannah Villiger's Work with Polaroid"

10.45–11.15 Coffee

11.15–12.00 Kristin Weber: "Becoming a Mother. The Body as a Carrier of Signs"

12.00–13.30 Lunch at eikones

13.30–14.15 Megan Luke: "Barbara Kasten. Photography and Plasticity"

14.15–15.00 Markus Klammer: "Ray Photographic"

15.00–15.30 Coffee

Saturday, December 2 (at eikones)

11.00–11.30 Coffee

11.30–12:15 Dennis Jelonnek: "How to Cope with Rumors and Radiation. Horst Ademeit's Photographic Practice"

12.15–13:30 Lunch

13.30–14:15 Katja Müller-Helle: "The Limits of Instagrammability. Self-Censorship on Social Media Platforms"

14.15–15.00 Meredith Stadler: "Ground Floor Photography. Reading John Miller's Series 'The Middle of the Day' (1994-present)"

15.00–15.15 Coffee

15.15–15.45 Final Discussion

16.00 Apéro

Reference:

CONF: Photography and Subjectivity (Basel, 30 Nov-2 Dec 23). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 17, 2023 (accessed Sep 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40645>>.