

G E O R G K A R G L F I N E A R T S

Press release

LIDDY SCHEFFKNECHT

sciography

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Legend has it that without shadow no art history would exist, as the latter was seemingly born out of the former. In the first century after Christ, Pliny the Elder, narrates the beginning of painting as a touching love story: a potter in Corinth named Butades, discovers the painting through the markings made by his daughter. Cast by the light of a lamp, Butades' daughter traces in outline the shadow on a wall of her lover's face. The lover is soon to travel abroad but his image shall stay with her. Although the history of painting seemed to start with the shadow, for a long time the shadows were unwelcome existence; when objects cast shadows, painting them becomes complicated. The painter has to designate a light source, to determine an angle for the incoming light, define where the shadow falls, if it overshadows other objects in the image, or if even two shadows intersect. Next to technical difficulties, an ideological problem is becoming apparent, since shadows temporise and secularise art. A shadow not only reveals different times of day; it also speaks of transience and ephemerality of the depicted. Thus the viewer no longer seems to perceive the eternal, but only the instant, which elapses as soon as the shadow moves further. Such difficulties in painting, both of practical and ideological nature, seem to become obsolete with the medium of photography, where the claim of actuality rules and where the recording of a fleeting moment and the freezing of time create both – concerns and possibilities. Photography can captivate permanently – and within a fraction of a second – a certain state of light and shadow. However, there is one thing this medium cannot provide: to stage the continuous change of light. This may only be done through film that is able to depict the temporal course of movement.

Between the poles of light and shadow, movement and standstill, Liddy Scheffknecht (born 1980) has been questioning and exhausting the limits of film, photography, installation, and drawing in her artistic practice for about 15 years. In her first solo show at Georg Kargl Fine Arts – in 2011 her works presented at the Georg Kargl BOX – she explores the relationship of temporality and perception and likewise creates and brakes with illusions. She expands photographic standstills through video projections and creates a medial hybrid between the static and the moving image, between the medium of photography and film.

In *La Journée* a video of two human shadows is being accurately projected onto a large-format photography of the Hofarkaden in Munich. The changing form of the shadows seems to be influenced not only by changing daylight conditions inside and outside the arcades, but paradoxically also by the architectural elements that indeed exist tangibly locally, but cannot be in place in the photographic image. The result is an uncanny, seemingly surreal scenario that reminds of Giorgio de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica*. The unsettling irritation also results from the shadows being produced by the light of the projector and in their lack of a reference within the image. Sliding into the arcades seemingly out of nothing is the shadow of a photographer, who appears to take a picture of another person's shadow turning up shortly afterwards. Both slowly drift from inside the arcades to the outside, to then disappear on the lower edge of the image. Even if in other video installations by Liddy Scheffknecht, the characters who seemingly throw the shadows are present in the photograph – such as the skiing couple in *point* – the shades nevertheless develop more or less independently from their primary object, they exceed the picture margin, modify and distort, and no longer allow the viewer to draw coherent visual conclusions.

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The complex relationship between movement and standstill, between objects and their shadows is addressed in Liddy Scheffknecht's photographic sequences and extrapolated into the absurd. In her photographic studies she takes recourse to the already known stylistic medium of the image series, where a sequel of images suggests temporal change and movement. Scheffknecht takes photographs of everyday objects and their seemingly appropriate shadows, whereby only one picture in the series shows a consistent illusion. However also through this picture the viewer enters Scheffknecht's absurdly constructed imagery. In allusion to the well-known piece of bungling, where after the construction of a windowless town hall, citizens vainly try to transport sunlight into the inside of the building by the use of buckets, Scheffknecht shows in her photographic series *spot* a fallen over bucket resting at always the same place on the floor. It's seemingly liquid content moves as light spot through the room and even on the photograph, where the illusion of the light spot and the corresponding object is the most congruent, one might wonder how these truly relate.

In the photographic series *Ceci n'est pas une plante*, a mental homage to René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, the artist turns the intellectual game on reality and illusion, and on the disjunction of signifier and signified insofar further, as she stages not the actual plant, but only its image – visibly fixed to the wall by the help of needles – together with the plant's shadow that seems to take on a life of its own. Relevant for the artistic methodology of Liddy Scheffknecht are factors such as slowness, loss of control, and poetic illusion. The shadows are not being manipulated digitally, but are constructed in a tiresome and meticulous analogue process that lies beyond her control and her sphere of influence and is rather dependent on the position of the sun, season of year, and weather conditions. Scheffknecht's perceptive studies render visible what lies outside the image frame. They appear to be snippets out of nature's studio, and seem at the same time artificially manipulated, since shadow and time form the artistic materials of construction.

Sciography, or shadow painting, is taken further in the photographic single images of this same title. Sunlight pierces windowpanes covered with colour foil and casts a colourful abstract image onto a sheet of paper resting on the floor. A photograph fixates the transitory moment that arises as such only once a day, provided a certain sun exposure. The colour shades that break on the paper folds become apparent in such a manner that it is not readable if the folds exist in the original illusionistic image or in its photographic copy. Fuzzy clouds of colour emerge. Their appealing depths almost remind of the transcendental colour field paintings by Mark Rothko and their ephemeral impression unfolds more and more, the closer the onlooker steps to the images. The beholder's extra-pictorial movement almost seems to activate an intra-pictorial motion, as if the vertical lines wave as colour mists out of the photograph, just to right away disappear again into it. The fleeting image develops in the viewer's mind, for the duration of the contemplation, and one is tempted to make the image talk using words by the ancient Greek poet Pindar: „A shadow's dream are humans.“

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