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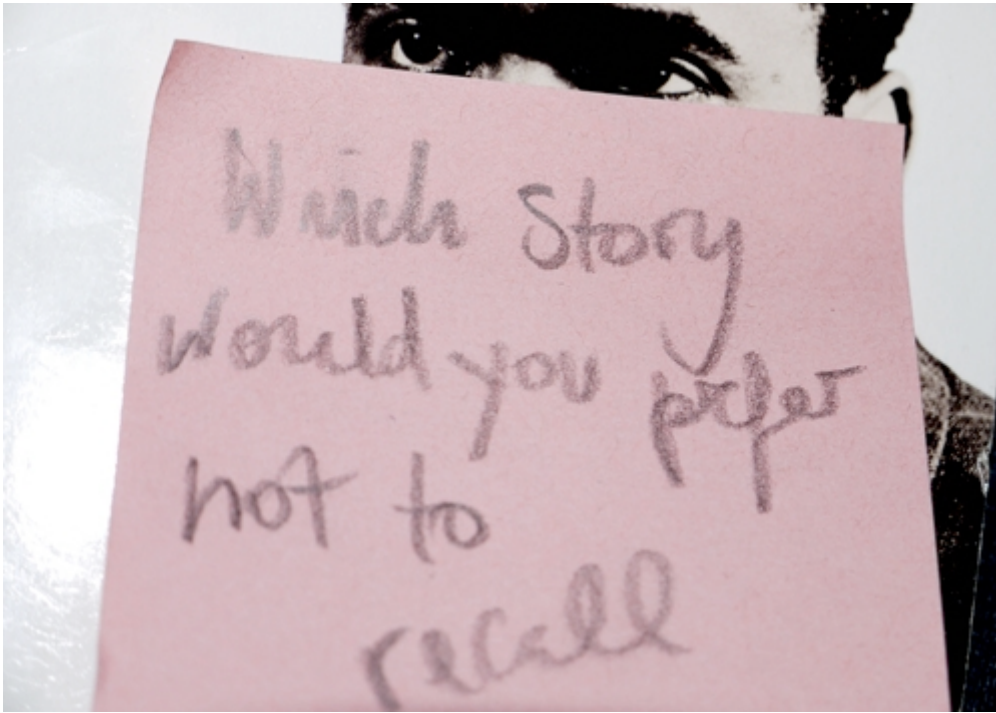
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frieze^{d/e}

Maya Schweizer

LANGENHAGEN, GERMANY

Kunstverein Langenhagen



Maya Schweizer, *Which Story Would You Prefer Not to Recall?* (detail), 2009–13

Identity, biography, politics, history and memory are recurring themes in Maya Schweizer's photographs and videos. And the title of this solo show, *Edith Seeshow's Notes*, is an encrypted summary of her approach, containing as it does the verbs 'edit', 'see' and 'show'. Although Ms. Seeshow plays no further role in the exhibition, present in each of these five works is her constant observing, collecting, sorting and assembling of images.

These works also share a specific theme: the filmic exploration of those public spaces and architecture that represent history. The first video, *Passing Down, frame one* (2007) acts as a counterpoint to this theme, placing Schweizer's family history centre stage. The artist reconstructs fragmentary memories of her Jewish grandmother, who only avoided being deported from Lyon in 1944 thanks to a misunderstanding. The film moves between France and Germany, and between the 1940s and Schweizer's everyday life today. This back-and-forth motion also shapes the film's image-text-sound structure: visually, geographical space is broken down among Aix-en-Provence, Berlin and Lyon, while audible is Schweizer's grandmother telling of her past. Inserted blocks of text appear on-screen, connecting meta-narrative and family documentary.

The three-channel video *Au dos de la carte postale* (On the back of the postcard, 2010) addresses in more depth questions of public space and the function of architecture. Focusing on the Eiffel Tower as the symbol of Paris

and as a tourist hub within the city, Schweizer combines photo and film footage from the Paris World's Fair of 1889, among others, as well as footage showing ethnographic displays popular around this time. She combines this material with scenes of today's illegal street traders, French police, and the tourist attractions around the tower. In the many-layered montage, analogies are revealed: between, say, ethnographic displays and the precarious situation of street traders who come from former French colonies. In this way, besides highlighting the repetition of (post-colonial) history, Schweizer also uses juxtaposition to examine the modes of construction present in historical and contemporary images.

Screened in a darkened room, the film *A Memorial, a Synagogue, a Bridge and a Church* (2012) makes do without subtitles, using high-contrast black-and-white images to examine changes in the urban fabric around Bratislava's Rybné námestie (Fish Square). During construction of the New Bridge over the Danube between 1967 and 1972, the apparently unnecessary demolition of the old Jewish quarter and the synagogue sparked protest from the local population. Unlike the other video works in the show, here the camera is predominantly static. The square's architectural volumes are scanned in fragments and combined with seemingly casual footage of the city's inhabitants going about their daily business, raising questions concerning a collective culture of memory and the political-social responsibility of each individual in relation to public space.

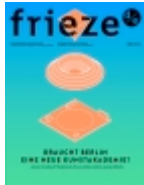
In terms of content, there were links here with the only photographic work in the exhibition, entitled *Which story would you prefer not to recall?* (2009). From her collection, Schweizer selected press photographs, historical images (for example, of the Eichmann trial in 1961) and portraits of famous personalities (including Barack Obama). To some of these she added coloured Post-it notes with handwritten phrases. One black and white newspaper image, for example, shows a car driving towards the Gaza Strip, the image annotated with the question: 'What would you prefer not to see?' In general, the artist generates an incomplete tableau of collective memory and questions the way history is produced and visually recorded. The exhibition as a whole functions something like a many-layered image-text-sound album with five tracks. The viewer's attention is raised whenever the private and the public, the past and the present, the real and the symbolic overlap – as new narrative modes and all that emerges between the images point beyond the individual work and reach out to the viewer's own experiences.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell

—by Cynthia Krell



About this review



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