

JUDITH HUEMER

The Art of Continuing to Move While Sitting Still

Making visible what passes by in everyday life; questioning anything regimented. It's the incidental that Judith Huemer focuses on in her photographs and objects. She wants her work to be understood as "subversive provocation." In 2022 the artist, who directs the faculty for Art and Intervention | Environment as adjunct professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, was awarded the Upper Austrian Prize for Photography. The large-format series *HEADQUARTERS* (since 2019), until recently displayed as part of the prize winners' exhibition in the Ursulinenhof in Linz, came about from such a conception: making sitting at a desk every day visible from the angle of the chair, by the artist taking her place at her scanner before she began work at her computer. The result is a kind of diary which was recorded consistently during lockdown but is more randomly set down today, and which shifts the point of view to a casual action and has it appear in a new light.

The procedure of making a continual record in projects that take years is consistent with Huemer's general practice. Another example is the series of *Blue Sky Monument* (2020), examples of which could also be seen in Linz: In collaboration with students and friends, the artist documented the deep blue lockdown sky which showed no traces of condensation. By collectively gathering images at sites all around the world, they created a photographic memorial for a temporary phenomenon, which hints at an intact environment. It is also a memorial for a change in thinking, as Huemer hopes, in that the abstention from flying caused by the pandemic makes people more cautious now.

In the case of *HEADQUARTERS* an intention to outsmart herself and her own routine was intrinsic to Huemer's diary-like act of scanning. Care for her own body—not to procrastinate, by no means to make things too easy for herself, but to shake herself up. Instead of simply sitting through life, what matters is to arouse deeper thoughts about automatized patterns of behavior.

For scanning at the level of her desk chair Huemer throws no costume on but shows herself in her everyday clothes. Even though the same items of clothing turn up again and again on different days, each print is unique. The sculptural character of any item alters not only because of the specific material but also because of the randomness with which it comes to rest on the scanner's glass plate. The fall of the folds is never the same: That is a small loss of control, indeed something banal, which Judith Huemer nevertheless raises to become the central moment of her work.

Consequently, the title *HEADQUARTERS* refers to more than the home office, which became the main setting for action during the pandemic. Rather, it also addresses, with a wink of her eye, the relationship between body and mind, our top-heaviness, in that the central switchboard is shifted from the head to the region of the buttocks. Huemer describes what thus becomes so visible as abstracted motionless sitting. The process is typical of her art practice: shifting something into a new situation for observation and thus directing attention into new pathways. At the same time, it is important for her to remain constantly on the move and to see gestures in a larger context, uncoupled from her own person.

Earlier works like *Territory* (2010/11) already made use of this kind of gesture. There Huemer reversed the narrow bar of censor-ship, turning the eye-slit of a burka, which concealed, for example, female nipples, into its opposite, thus directing one's gaze through narrow photographic bars directly to a woman's décolleté to deal with society's claims to control the female body in a larger context.

Which of the daily scans are to be selected for printing on satiny material to create *HEADQUARTERS* for the exhibition room is a decision made by Huemer intuitively. She chooses according to aesthetics and colors, the specific folds, and the relationship of the materials to each other. The series is not yet finished-the charm of the materials is still great, says Huemer. The fact that certain "twitches" occur in the process-errors in the scan which are transferred to the print-makes it clear that artistic work is also a dialog with a technical device.

On the soft faux-velour polyester satin, the scans finally achieve an object-like quality. For Huemer, the satiny base material of the pictures awakens art-historical associations with a completely and utterly noble material, which is always associated with a masculine gesture of power. The artist addresses this as well as the still echoing hierarchy of materials in the art world, which applies less to textiles than to bronze or canvas. Her reaction to that is both playful and straight in your face! •

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