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The Realm of Anonymity and Silence

The work of Egemen Tuncer is critically dealing with the interrelationship of reality and photography by questioning their notions of objectivity, subjectivity and constructivity. For achieving this, the artist is digging deep into the inner being of photography for reviewing its ontology, as well as its current meaning as a tool for reflecting reality.

Reality, what a simple word for such a complex construct. What a short term for the multilayered images that form our world. Reality is a mindscape, which is built from the visuals of every moment of our existence. Though, are we the receiver or the producer of the images in our head? Do we passively perceive or actively create the reality constructions we live with? To what degree are we spectator or actor? And, in the end, can we trust and believe in these weird images?

The accuracy and accountability of reality representations get questioned for quite a long time now. Starting with the schools of realism and naturalism back in the mid of the 19th century, the history of modern art is characterized to a great deal through the critical review of the meaning of representation. With the help of abstraction and deformation, art's duty to represent and reflect the world and its ideas became less and less important. After the invention of the camera, the fine arts moved to the invisible but intellectually, emotionally and spiritually moving. Now, the photographer took over the mirroring of reality. Even objectivity was supposed to be given now. Just think about the term that we use for the main part of the camera. Though, today, we are all aware that through the selection of the life-image, its framing and post-production no objective but rather a subjective comment on reality is given. Indeed, the tension between objectivity and subjectivity in photography is as old as its 191-year-old history. Today, photos can be counted as legal document, as well as subjective and personal comments on someone's life.

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The picture that we receive from the camera was in the past based on chemical reactions on paper. So, can chemicals mirror reality? Are they not forming another reality per se, as they are made of a certain mix of materials that differ from the one of the original subject? Is not every two-dimensional photography automatically an abstraction, a false simulation and simplified version of the world? In this sense, does not this image constitute another reality, its own reality, which resembles ours but is still so different? So, what is the being, the character and meaning of photography? Is it a passive and neutral instrument for representation? Is it an instrument, which does not allow much interaction and interference? Or is it just another tool like a brush or a music instrument with which you express your thoughts and feelings? Questions like these are fundamental for the understanding of photography today, and they stand in the center of Egemen Tuncer's oeuvre as well.

Especially painters reviewed photography's existential problems during the second half of the 20th century. See e.g. Gerhard Richter, Sigmund Polke, Roy Lichtenstein, and Richard Prince as well as Chuck Close and other photorealists, who discussed photography's meaning regarding its use as instrument for accurately reflecting reality. All of them had doubts towards the objective validity of photos, and so deconstructed the medium by revealing its structuralism and materialism.

After digital photography replaced chemicals with non-physical data, the question of its ontological being entered another intellectual dimension. Now, the images of the real world are translocated into an abstract matrix of codes, numbers and electrical connections. Sharing these on a digital network like the internet and its many social media adds another abstraction to their existence. Now, the last physicality of the images dissolves between the uncountable bits and bytes of our digital world, where the virtual reality swallows the real one for forming a diffuse construct of complex but sweet lies.

Egemen Tuncer's work deals with the formal structure and ontological meaning of today's photography by discussing the materialistic being of photos. He constructs images that resemble our world *and* look like photos that are supposed to represent it. So, he reviews the concepts of our first *and* second reality. Though, his work goes beyond a critique of the given. Tuncer produces a third version of reality. Being neither

a reflection of the real world nor the result of a classic photographic process, his oeuvre shifts between photography, painting and digital media art. Of course, due to its formal and aesthetic characters and references, his work shows closeness to photography. Though, they have more in common with painting because of their intensive post-production process, in which the pieces receive their final aesthetic. Here, it is surely no coincidence that his BA-Education is in photography while his MA is in painting.

In his current series entitled *Things in a Chamber* (2017), Egemen Tuncer presents images of his studio, which are neither realistic pictures nor photos in the traditional sense. The works are created with image-making programs, and therefore are rather digitally made and computer-based media artworks than photos. Nevertheless, the pictures clearly reflect the environment, the artist is working in. In this context, the pieces draw relations to still life and interior paintings, as well as to advertisement and product-design-photography.

Still-life painting became a genre of its own in the 16th century. Since then, next to being highly decorative and prestigious, the paintings always commented on the circle of life. Even the good and the evil could be seen between the arrangements of fruits, and dead animals as well as plates and glasses. So, the still-life was a mirror of the world. *Things in a Chamber* reflects Egemen Tuncer's environment he works in. Though, the studio gets depicted only in details, where parts of office furniture and instruments like pencils, rulers or spray-cans refer to the way he works. Clean and without any trace of a human being, the objects have a sterile aesthetic, which causes a sense of strangeness and alienation. The lack of any labeling supports the laboratory-like character of the images. In a laboratory, models of the world get created. The complexity of life gets simplified into formulas, data and infographics. Reality becomes one-dimensional and its understanding becomes easy. At the same time, these models and formulas are never realistic but abstractions. Yes, they refer to reality but are at the same time realities themselves.

This interrelationship of various reality constructions and representations is fundamental for Egemen Tuncer's current series. In the realistic looking environments, no labels, no dirt, no dust, no finger prints or other traces of a human interaction with the objects or the space is given. This is the reason why the pictures seem close but

distant, familiar but strange, and realistic but artificial. The lack of strong colors and contrasts underlines the clean and artificial aspect of the works. In the end, the total absence of people gives the images a strong sense of loneliness. Though, the emptiness that surrounds the objects makes it also easier to solely focus on their existence. If people or even just traces of humans would be there, the existence of the objects and their narration would be attached and bound to them. Now, as no human trace is given, the spectator can exclusively concentrate on the existence of the objects, and their interrelationship. This stresses their importance. In the realm of anonymity and silence, they are kings and queens. Normally, we do not give them much of our precious time and attention. In Tuncer's pieces though, they are the only protagonists, the leaders of their worlds.

The ascetic all-over aesthetic of the pieces underlines the timelessness of the series. As there is no imprint of life, and no rudiments of reality, no traces of time are given. This lack of time gives the pictures a great freedom and independency from the world, to which visual art in general and photography especially is linked to. Everything that we live with is intertwined to the time of its existence. It is part of its identity and meaning as well as its contextual role and function. When you take away its time, it becomes alienated, and artificial. Just the gods live detached from time, and this might be the reason why *Things in a Chamber* contains a strange sense of divinity, and the sublime. The things in his series are therefore not only protagonists, leaders or kings but god-like beings. Surrounded by a timeless and spaceless vacuum, they exist without any contextual limitation. They simply are, without a concrete or realistic notion of time and space.

Besides time, also any concrete description of space is absent. Like in an endless desert, there is no right or left, no up or down, no trace of a spatial reality that refers to the world we live in. Just like the lack of time, the absence of space strengthens the alienation and artificiality of the pieces. The lack of space points to the objects themselves. Freed from any concrete space-connotations, they are just beings, entities with no connection to physics or spatial realities that we are depending on. First, they look like they are in an office, or are part of an office, and therefore, the setting seems

familiar. On the second look though, it all feels weird due to the lack of any link to the human world.

So, what we see are reality models in chambers, where things are presented as divine clones. A clone is a copy of an existing thing. Though, in Tuncer's series, the clones prove and underline their own rights to exist. They point to the original world, but at the same time show proudly their own artificiality. Woven into in the matrix of hyperreality, the images relate to our first and second realities, just to establish a synthesis, which can be understood as a third one. Which one the spectator prefers is up to him and her. They all have their own advantages and disadvantages as well as their flaws and rights to exist. Fact is, that they are all linked to each other for building the complex web of data that we live with. Egemen Tuncer's series relates to this very well, and I find the sterile realities of his things in a chamber aesthetically appealing and intellectually challenging. For some spectators, they may cause fear, for others peace. In any case, the works mean great chances to experience the interconnection between the various visual worlds we live with. They also give the spectator the possibility to form his own constructions and insights, and so transform him from a passive receiver to an active participant in reality-constructions; someone, who fills the pictorial vacuum with his thoughts for leaving his personal traces within the image.