MARIE JESCHKE, CAN'T REMEMBER ALWAYS ALWAYS

By Joseph Constable

Gustav Janouch once told Frank Kafka that 'the necessary condition for an image is sight', to which Kafka smiled and replied: 'we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes' (cf. Barthes 54).

How can we understand photography as a form of exorcism, transformed from a vehicle of memory into a means of psychological erasure? Humans make images in order to remember, to locate, monumentalise, or to possess a captured subject. On the contrary, Kafka intimates that our impulse to make images allows us to shut our eyes; we are no longer coerced into remembering because they become physical (or digital) substitutes for our own memory.

What happens, then, when images fail us, when a personal confrontation with an old photograph falters? This rupture of memory forms the starting point for a new body of work by Marie Jeschke, which began life in a collection of family photographs taken of the artist whilst growing up in Rostock, Germany. Jeschke is pictured in different poses: a school photograph, on-board a boat, standing in her teenage bedroom, or jumping from a rock into water. To paraphrase Roland Barthes, she is observed by the camera lens in the process of 'posing', transforming her body into static, indexical images (10-11). However in spite of the artist's presence in each photograph, Jeschke is unable to remember the moments when they were taken.

These family photographs are damaged: the ink appears scratched away or the image burnt by fire. This effect is caused by Jeschke's submerging them in 'personalised' solutions comprising food waste, chemical and cosmetic products. Not only do we see the results of this process within the framed works on the wall, but Jeschke has also created this real-time process within the exhibition. This takes the form of a pseudo photographic laboratory: a table with glass vitrines in which a new selection of images are developing.

Jeschke's protestation – *Can't Remember Always Always* – which gives her exhibition at l'étrangère its title, is located within a contemporary context of image and data proliferation within the digital realm. As curator Hans Ulrich Obrist explains:

> we have more and more information but less and less memories. Maybe amnesia is at the core of the digital age…it could all be lost, yet at the same time, there is also this awesome possibility of deleting

things so they aren't there forever. Hoarding is the central impulse of our age' (Dazed Digital).

What is interesting about Jeschke's production, however, is its return to a near-outmoded type of image: the analogue photograph. In contrast to the digital matter that Obrist describes, the artist's childhood photographs hold an unbreakable connection to their index. They can be held, ripped, bent, folded or torn, however the subject matter remains mortified within each image. By putting these images through a further process of development, they become material to be played with. Jeschke's action is a violent reclamation of their content, one that evidences the artist's disbelief and mistrust in the primacy of the image. Her process may be analogue, however her performative approach to image-making is informed by the slippery unreliability of our contemporary digital image streams. This slipperiness is embedded within the solutions themselves. Compounded from commercial products, they form a sticky, abject flow of capitalist waste that distorts the represented authenticity of these artist 'portraits'. The title of this series – *Neti Neti (Neither This Nor That)* (2015) – echoes the unreliable, fluid state of these images. They are neither analogue nor digital, neither my 'self' nor my image, neither my past nor my present.

Jeschke rejects our collective anxiety to preserve and, by extension, remember. Through this she also refers to a concomitant action: that of collecting, or according to Obrist, our contemporary impulse to hoard. In one image from Jeschke's series of portraits we see evidence of the artist's own teenage collection: books, photographs, posters, a Kurt Cobain portrait that sits to the left of the artist's own profile. Arranged in an assemblage - a *tableau vivant* - this particular image sets up a relationship between the artist and the objects that constitute her adolescent identity.

The processes of collecting objects, mark-making, and identity-formation connects to Jeschke's sprawling installation in the front gallery, titled *Kieshofer Moor, Always* (2015). The work's starting point is the artist's ongoing accumulation of collectible football stickers, which Jeschke has enlarged and printed onto a series of aluminium forms. Cheap, ephemeral and mass-produced, these pocket-sized icons are exalted within the exhibition to the level of a sculptural totem. Jeschke is clearly interested in the human endeavour to define oneself through membership, belonging and allegiance. Similar to the photographic series, *Neti Neti*, which begins from an inability to identify, these stickers indicate another kind of image hoarding.

The abstract shapes on which the stickers are printed were appropriated by the artist during research at Hiddensee Island in Northern Germany, where each island family is represented by one of these markers. Jeschke's enlargement of these sporting celebrities and printing them onto the symbols is an attempt to scrutinise these images, to access a latent meaning. All that remains, however, is the maximised materiality of these images; the CMYK

ink circles that constitute these flat simulacra. The fruitless impulse to hoard and to iconise is thus rendered in these empty images.

The backgrounds for these forms are photographic abstractions of a natural landscape. Their source is a series of archival photographs taken between 1970-71 by the artist's biologist grandfather at Kieshofer Moor near Greifswald. These archival, scientific photographs are what Vilém Flusser would call 'traditional' images, meaning they designate a particular time and place. By digitally stretching and reproducing the photographs in analogue form, Jeschke transforms them into abstract, warped renditions. They are 'technical' images that move beyond the site of Kieshofer Moor into an eternally rotating memory of a natural landscape. Technical images, according to Flusser, make it possible to 'grasp the ungraspable and visualise the invisible' (16). In other words, Jeschke's appropriation of her grandfather's archival imagery and combining them with the symbolic imprints from Hiddensee Island, sets up a speculative encounter between a very human object-orientated ontology and the inconceivable rhythms and processes of the natural world.

What is left behind from this encounter is a prevailing futility (consider the fallen symbol that sits 'de-printed' on the gallery floor). The epistemological endeavour to record, to archive, to identify, and to imprint, is at the heart of Jeschke's suspicion as an artist. By questioning the foundations on which our perception and understanding of objects and images is based, her speculative approach permits an escape: a passage into a more mobile, ever-expanding mode of thinking and making. As Steven Shaviro explains in reference to this speculative method within current artistic practice:

> Reality is far weirder than we are able to imagine. Things never conform to the ideas that we have about them; there is always something more to them than what we are able to grasp. The world does not fit into our own cognitive paradigms and narrative modes of explanation. 'Man' is not the measure of all things. This is why speculation is necessary (44).

Out of her inability to remember, Jeschke creates her own network of understanding.

Works cited:

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