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Filip Berendt
MATERIAL DESUBLIMATION

“Human eyes tolerate neither sun, coitus, cadavers, nor obscurity, but with different reactions.” With this phrase, taken from the surrealist text *L'Anus solaire*, the French philosopher Georges Bataille points out that mankind has a tendency to alienate, with anguish or disgust, certain elements of existence from one's field of vision, thus from everyday life, regardless of knowing that these elements are fundamental and inevitable. But it's these elements, regarded as obscure and because of this relegated to the margins of human acceptance, which Bataille considers to be the only source of the contradiction which can lead man to overcome its contemplation of pure forms and undertake a search for unknown expressions. From this, the notions of “abjection” and “informe” (formless) emerge, on which the philosopher based the majority of his thinking in order to underline the end of the art-beauty equation which had conditioned art history up until the vanguards of the early twentieth century.

Filip Berendt takes this reflection as his starting point and much of his artistic work is employed to represent it: through a new interpretation of organic substances and the unusual juxtaposition of various elements, the Polish photographer undertakes a research which surpasses the limits dictated by both conventional and abstract structures, in favour of the freedom of concrete forms.



Filip Berendt, from the series Pandemic

The series *Pandemic* revolves around the close encounter with elements such as mould and fungal colonies, which are captured in their nature of live substance, enriched by an array of details. Although they appear as though objective, these images are not characterised by the detachment of a scientific documentation: on the contrary, as the title itself suggests, they hold within them a hidden energy, universal and potentially dangerous. The inevitable encounter with something we're used to thinking of in terms of the semantic field of the "small" and "superficial", disturbs us and at the same time seduces us. As a direct consequence, in the attempt to control these feelings we're driven to place what we see into a familiar domain, by instinctively finding references to abstract iconography or to objects characterised by recognisable forms and functions. The effectiveness of the project, which insists on the gap between habit and perception, is guaranteed by the "excess of form", defined as such by Bataille himself. It's not so much the subject that creates discomfort in the viewer, but the importance the photographer gives to it, from the point of view of composition and dimension.



Filip Berendt, from the series *Still Life*

In *Still Life*, Berendt further exaggerates the desublimation of the images by shifting the attention from a purely material level to one based around the connections between different elements. The photographs, based on the juxtaposing, overlapping and combination of objects of different nature and origin, capture an interaction between them of which we're not able to identify the origin nor the meaning: if analysed individually, we would be able to recognise many of the elements portrayed, but their simultaneous presence in the same scene cancels any possibility of recognising a logical dimension. In this series, as in *Pandemic*, the organic proliferation is dominant, but here the sense of attraction and repulsion is absorbed by a larger mechanism of

curiosity and distress which on the one hand disturbs us, on the other hand opens up new possibilities of interpretation.

What Bataille theorised as “informe”, in other words the third option capable of overcoming the opposition between form and content, passes through the same procedure of being thrown into disorder which Berendt carries out in his photographs: concentrating on the obvious, they surpass the hierarchy and absolute values to emancipate our artistic vision from any pre-established aesthetic ideal.