

Unforeseeable Occurrences

Collecting, analysing, speculating and fragmenting; these are just some of the words that describe the process of Vienna-based artist, Anita Witek, whose abstract photographic compositions explore the mutable spaces that exist within the realms of image making. Working across photomontage, slide projection, video and site-specific installation, Witek's work takes root from her extensive archive of print material, such as newspapers, magazines, books and posters, which she re-appropriates and re-casts through an alternative lens. Key to how this lens functions is the repeated process of erasing the main signifiers within each of the indexical images, be they people, objects, or text that allow the viewer to understand them in the intended sense. Witek therefore breaks apart the semiotic chain binding these images, subsequently cutting, reconfiguring and photographing these newly generated fragments. In doing so, her works quietly resist the velocity and visual noise that characterises the easily consumable flux of images that we receive daily, asking the viewer to slow down and access a new frame of looking.

Unforeseeable Occurrences is a new series of works made by Witek over the last six months. Embedded within the zeitgeist and atmosphere of the current situation, each of the photographic works convey an idiosyncratic and abstract picture of now. The artist's starting point was a series of archival copies of PM Magazine (formerly known as 'PM – Peter Moosleitner's interesting magazine') from the 1980s, a German popular science publication that centres on questions and debates around science and technology. The retro editions that Witek collected contain speculations about tomorrow's world, technological interventions and scientific discoveries, a series of future visions that oscillate between science fictional pseudoscience and at times accurate depictions of what is to come. The blurring of fact and fiction embedded within the pages that Witek was holding decades later engendered for the artist a mode of speculation that is perhaps not that far away from the ways in which information is generated in our contemporary moment.

We are living in a world in which the value of truth has been thrown into disarray: advertisements are presented to us based on a personal yet invisible accumulation of our online movements; world leaders tell lies and facilitate news stories in order to gain public traction; billionaires funnel their wealth through offshore tax havens, and pseudoscientists propagate ideas of bodily wellness. The extreme nature of these examples (some of which are subtly referred to within the titles of Witek's photographs (*The Motivational Speaker*, *Offshore Breeze*, *Plant Based Dietician*)) serves to illustrate the bizarre world in which we are living, a situation that has only intensified in recent months during the pandemic. The heightened awareness of the news and the concentration of information and headlines that characterises this moment has created a strange kind of science fiction that is, in fact, our present-day reality.

The intensity of the current moment is harnessed by Witek in each of the works, where the central subject has been removed in order to create a new image. The titles of the works and the compositions themselves reflect a repository of references that the artist has collected over the past few months. Personal anecdotes, Instagram posts, news stories, books and songs engender a certain sensibility and rhythm that is in line with the erratic and at times overwhelming nature of how we continue to receive information. Grounding each of the works are the titles themselves, which are taken from a cumulative list that Witek has been building over time. By aligning these textual vignettes with those of her photographic compositions, she works through a process of linguistic play, asking how each title may or may not inform what we are looking at. This use of language marks a departure within Witek's practice, bringing the bearing of linguistic signifiers together on a level plane with the visual ones that she has continued to work with throughout her career. Rather than operating as visual descriptors, the titles are potential prompts or inroads into the images, allowing for new tensions and meanings to arise. In this sense, each work

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becomes a speculative exercise, blending the 'truth' of the original image with the fictive narratives that can be deciphered within its abstract rendition.

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