

STAGINGS OF A ROOM

STEFFI KLENZ

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Steffi Klenz’s practice is preoccupied with the built environment, critically exploring the notion of place and spatiality. Her work unfolds in urban places and buildings but it is not architectural photography; instead it uncovers unexpected narratives and traces of history embedded in the place.

Klenz’s recent works *Beun (*2015-16) and *He Only Feels the Black and White of it* (2016) explore the moment when a photographic image ‘fails’ to communicate as a document. Her images engage with the shifting meanings of the word document, challenging conventional conceptions of lens-based representation in this genre.

Klenz’s images are instead fragmented, mediating between figuration and abstraction. Each image becomes a space of presence and absence at the same time; what is revealed in one image is concealed in another. Klenz’s work suggest that navigating a terrain or building results in navigating through her images in which the sequence of fragmented images equally disrupts and reveals the narrational and representational potential of the photographed place.

The photographic series *Beun* begins with an Associated Press Photograph of a concentration camp in Ohrdruf, East-Germany, from a private photographic archive in London. Various digital software programs have been applied to the image, resulting in multiple transformed and fragmented versions of the same image. By digitally corrupting the image file, the image becomes ruptured, deformed and disfigured into digital codec mismatch. Collapsing time and space, the resulting images re-emerge as the same, yet not-quite-the-same, photograph: recognizable but strangely out of reach.

Klenz new video piece *Beun (2016)* refers to an unknown World Prison Camp gathered from the same private photographic collection based in London. Klenz constructed a life-size model in her studio following the exact same spatial arrangements and dimensions as well as photographic conditions such as lighting and camera position of the archive image. Klenz filmed this architectural replica using time-splice effects rotating the set around its own axis, producing an orbiting viewpoint of the movement of the architectural construction as hyper-slow-motion. The architectural space is frozen in time, continuously looping backwards and forwards. Klenz applied software algorithms that fragment and rupture the imagery in a similar manner to the photographic images of the photographic series *Beun*.

Klenz is interested in putting the viewer of *Beun* in the position of ‘spiraling’ or ‘hovering’, unable to literally finish or exhaust the piece. She provides an experience of looking: a form of unfolding that suggests that no single visualization can offer a transparent interpretation of such a historical place.

*He only feels the Black and White of It* explores the impact of the political dictatorship in the former East Germany. The work is based on a 1973 Associated Press photograph of a damaged section of the Berlin Wall, and depicts East German military guards and border police repairing the Wall following an attack by West Germans in response the sound of East German guns. Multiple screenprints of the photograph were made, each slightly different from the others. The photograph also triggered a series of reflections on the artist’s own family history, and the text highlights the loss of freedom and identity experienced by her father as a young man in East Germany.