

Sun 11.12.2016 – Sun 30.04.2017

Albrecht Kunkel: QUEST Photographs 1989–2009

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We'd like to invite you to the press conference on Thursday 08.12.2016, at 11:00 a.m.. The exhibition will be opened on Saturday 10.12.2016 at 19:00 p.m., together with the "Leibniz' Storehouse" exhibition.

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The QUEST exhibition presents an overview of the photographic work of Albrecht Kunkel (1968–2009) for the first time. Kunkel was a seeker, who systematically dedicated his creative work to the fundamental issues of human existence. His photographs focus on landscapes and areas of special historical, cultural or social importance and trace the cultural practices encoded in them. The themes range from the earliest ritual cave and rock drawings to the present-day multimedial mass of images. The artist also integrated other photo material into his work, including topographical aerial images or historic archive footage, and explored the conditions and possibilities of the photographic medium on the cusp of the digital age. Among other places, Kunkel studied at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG) with Thomas Struth, with Bernd and Hilla Becher and was a master student with Katharina Sieverding. He lived in Berlin, Paris and New York. His photographic estate was donated to the collection of the ZKM | Karlsruhe in 2013.

Albrecht Kunkel's creative work is evidence not only of a wide range of interests in cultural history and philosophy, it also identifies the photographer as an artist that is aware of the paradigms of his medium. Kunkel *did not* want to create images of the world. He wanted to theoretically penetrate the world – in the medium of photography. "I am interested in how people device value systems for the world through pictures, which ideas are conveyed through images and which mechanisms are behind images" (Albrecht Kunkel). His pictures lead you into artificial underwater landscapes (*Life*, 1994) or to hotspots of today's media events (*Cannes / Red Carpet*, 2003). They exhibit important sites of collective memory, including prehistoric caverns (1996 / 1998), the archaeological excavations in Troy (2002) or the holy sites of Jerusalem (2007). Albrecht Kunkel's artistic wish can be described as a localisation of culture with the medium of photography. At a critical distance or with interested proximity, his images focus on their subject – culture –, referring in this way to the design of history and reality that is intrinsic to the image.

His *Color Excerpts Monochrome* series (1998), among others, shows that Kunkel also dealt critically with the possibilities and limitations of his own medium. He created this group of large monochrome photo prints without a camera, solely based on the immense enlargement of a tiny section of his cave photography. Exempt from the demand of representation, the medium

Press information

December 2016

**Albrecht Kunkel: QUEST
Photographs 1989–2009**
Exhibition

Place
ZKM | Karlsruhe

Period
Sun 11.12.2016 – Sun 23.04.2017

Opening
Sat 10.12.2016, 19:00 p.m.

Place
ZKM_Lichthof 1+2

Press Contact
Dominika Szope
Head of Press and
Publicity Office
Tel: +49 (0) 721 / 8100 – 1220

Regina Hock
Spokesperson for Press and
Publicity Office
Tel: +49 (0) 721 / 8100 – 1821

Email: presse@zkm.de
www.zkm.de/presse

ZKM | Center for Art and
Media Karlsruhe
Lorenzstraße 19
76135 Karlsruhe

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becomes inevitably the focus of attention.

As part of the Donald Judd scholarship at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa in the USA, Kunkel expanded the palette of his artistic processes further. He began to incorporate other photo material into his work, the choice of which reflects his interest in the interrelationship of natural and cultural environments. From the U. S. Department of Agriculture, he acquired topographical aerial shots of certain areas in the United States, from which he created black-and-white prints. The resulting *Aerial Views* series (2002–2006) shows the introduction of (sub) urban civilisation into scenic natural landscapes in the typical chequered site development of American settlements. In their conceptual selection, arrangement and titling, the works, some of which remained incomplete, referred to the domains of artist colleagues from conceptual art and land art, such as Dan Graham and Robert Smithson or to historic filming locations, like those of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. While the images taken from aircraft originally served as a basis and analysis tool for various research institutions, Kunkel uses them to produce an art-history cartography, which attributes an initially invisible relevance to the depicted spots.

With its question about the origins and conditions of imagery, Kunkel's work combines the search for sites of the origin of culture. In the *Pilgrimage* series (2007), he photographed the religious sites of Jerusalem, which date back to the first spatial localisations of Jewish and Christian belief. His pictures present them in the focus of religious efficiency and touristic attraction alike and show both believers in prayer and groups of travelling visitors.

The exhibition also presents his portrait series of pregnant women, the descendants of emigrants or novices and commissioned work for magazines and publishers, which complement his conceptual series.

Curator of the exhibition: Erec Gellautz

An approx. 200-page publication is being published on the exhibition: Peter Weibel with Andreas Beutin and Erec Gellautz (Ed.), *Albrecht Kunkel: QUEST. Fotografien 1989-2009*, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna, December 2016. Contributions by Jana Duda, Erec Gellautz, Ursula Frohne, Christian Katti and Mirjam Lewandowsky.

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