Autor: Florian Sorgo
Occasion: artist book *„pictures of pictures“*
Translation: Reuben Matthews
Year: 2022

A (never-arriving, overflowing) interpretation (of a friend and his work)

/ It's a tricky undertaking, talking about a work of art: It's always open to a special reading, an interpretation. One might say that – if one understands interpretation as a kind of translation – that it is always trying to catch up to a work of art but never quite can. To an extent, this is even true for the artists themselves. A work of art always keeps its distance, even from the artist. This is because a work isn't finished when artistic production ends. Art goes on being produced between the work itself and the rest of the world. Of course, it's the same with the interpretation of the work at hand. But in some ways, the ambivalence is intensified even further here. Because on the one hand, I know the artist who made this work – I know him well and have for a long time. I know how he works. I believe to have an understanding of how he thinks, how he appropriates the world. On the surface, this may seem to award me some advantage, but it gives rise to the risk of overinterpretation. There is a risk of psychological analysis. On the other side, it is one of the content of the work's concrete concerns to escape readability in some way. At least, that's how I understand it. This means that the ambivalence between attempts at interpretation and the non-catchability of artwork is even greater here – due to my closeness to the artist Lukas Matuschek and the textual nature of the piece itself.
I can't solve this ambivalence. But it enlarges this in-between space so that it becomes possible for me to make myself at home there. For in the end, it is this in-between space that makes room for my remarks. Hence and paradoxically, I employ the strategy of overinterpretation to convey why this work in particular must elude a clear reading.

// If one were to flip through the pages of this book, one would see a kind of film. Rather, less a film than cinematography – a camera panning to individual images to create a sequence representing a defined stretch of Lukas' life.
However – and this distinction is crucial – representation is not simply depiction. Above all, representation means, through (later) portrayal, the present absence of the depicted. This depiction not only distorts our view as recipients of what underlies the artwork; the author of the images himself has to allow for a loss through representation. But it is this very loss – whether for the author or the recipients – that is simultaneously charged with meaning. The loss of meaning makes space for other levels of meaning. While often a source of problems, here it is part of the concept.
Strictly speaking, the individual images in the book – which itself creates a virtual, dynamic, and lively tracking shot and thus places the individual images in an organic sequence – were taken from a series of photographs from Lukas' smartphone gallery. The reduced selection of 40 individual images is personal in nature: Each of the photos references a circumstance and by doing so references a given context without actually showing it. In this sense, each individual image is more like an index, a reference, than self-referential. But the inherent meaning of the depicted is lost not only through the seeming randomness of the subject.

The next step in the production of this work is the transfer of the digital photograph to a traditional canvas. A canvas as it has been used by painters – thus in keeping with "artist" in the highly prototypical sense – for an eternity. This transfer – not through painting but by means of print – results in a filter of a kind. By using a filter – by now a standard feature of smartphone photography and in social media – the photograph is first alienated. However, this alienation also permits multiple images to be optically homogenized. Here, both alienation and homogenization serve a purpose. Then there is a third component that might seem somewhat trivial: In technical terms, this analog use of a filter always has identical results, but unpredictable variations accompany the process. Variations that the artist has no control over. And doesn't even seek control over.

This means we are dealing with three levels here: First, the further alienation of the image's content and the removal of its own meaning. Second, the aesthetic homogenization that makes the sequencing possible beyond all questioning. And thirdly, the addition of an unpredictability that is, while inconspicuous to the recipients, certainly of relevance to the artist. I will address the latter level of process-related accident first. This level comprises a release of responsibility and purposefulness. It is precisely this level that stands symbolically for the lack of influence that artists truly and finally have on their own work. It is the first step in releasing the work to the world. Indeed, if Lukas takes his work seriously, he must take this step, which is a form of surrender. Because the greatest sacrifice the artist has to make is the final release (and surrender) of their own work into the world.

The other two levels, however, are more readily evident to the recipients. The level of alienation is, at this point, largely clear. It comprises – as discussed above – the increasing removal from each individual image of the risk of standalone meaning. Because what each image shows is not of importance for the meaning of the work. Actually, that would be somewhat unfortunate here. But, like the level of alienation, the level of homogenization – which first makes it possible to sequence the images, lending them readability – has above all an aesthetic purpose. And it is this level especially that meets us recipients halfway. However, this step into the aesthetic – and thus a step toward the viewer – is not merely about creating enjoyment. Paradoxically, this step provokes an availability to viewers of their own reading of the work. And it does so by means of an increasing distance to the underlying work as it lies at the feet of the artist. It is through aesthetics – in the sense of perception and sensation – that recipients gain the opportunity to appropriate something that fundamentally eludes
a clear reading.

/// The edges blur, the contrasts decrease. The entirety becomes a gelatinous mass, corroding but also conserving. And there arise impressionistic mental landscapes. The loss of readability – already contained in the subject of the image itself but reinforced by alienation and the uncommented sequencing – is for good reason: For what the images are referencing is none of our business.

Photographs are usually composed in such a way as to make a selection that more or less intentionally omits the surroundings. When one takes a picture of something, one makes a selection centered around a focal point. Here, the opposite happens. The selection is irrelevant, and the focal point is – at the latest with the aid of the filter – not present anymore. Because here, the selection is nothing; and the surroundings, the context, is everything. The depicted itself is irrelevant.

But yet, or perhaps for that very reason, the framing is important. But not as a carrier of content. But rather as a carrier in its own right. Because the carrier – I'm speaking here ultimately of the frame (not the canvas) – is part of an ordering system. The carrier serves images (mental images, not depictions) as a bearing surface and imposes on them a boundary. The frame is the storage format of lossy memory (on the author's side) and an imaginary boundary (on the recipient's side). And it does so to the extent and by the fact that it negates exactly that which it references. In this respect, the indexes are what they are: Nothing

more than orientations, vectors, containing nothing themselves but pointing to something. And in the case of this work, they point so unclearly – and thus to an extent so correctly – to something that will never be accessible to us and which, even to the artist himself, is constantly losing its substance.

//// The selection of images contained in this book is, however, also contained in another way. I have to get rather personal here – because it's about Lukas' shelves. Ordering systems of a sort, shelves are universal and general. One might make the claim that the "form follows function" principle is seldom so clearly illustrated than by a shelf. But with Lukas, it is even more unique, even more characteristic. For Lukas, shelves carry a special weight beyond the weight of what they merely carry. His apartment, the studio we share – everywhere Lukas is clearly present he tries to take over with self-made shelves. And these shelves are always cut to the contents they are intended to order and to the surroundings where they will take up space.In this way, these self-made shelves are ordering systems that themselves adapt to what they are intended to order and into their surroundings. In turn, this means on the one hand that Lukas can never build a shelf where everything finds its right place; and on the other hand, that there can never be a shelf that fully satisfies every surrounding. This function lets Lukas order the unorderable in shelves that themselves cannot be contained with perfect order in a given surrounding. And vice versa, the objects in the shelves frame the shelves themselves in a way, as the shelves frame their surroundings. Thus, building shelves to Lukas is a perpetual and never-ending process. A process that has to withstand the impossible orderability of things in the same way it has to always find space in its surroundings. It is not a coincidence that Lukas is always building new shelves (which he always scraps to build even more new shelves).

So this work – as I see it – hints at a basic tenet of Lukas' character. It illustrates a part of him. Or rather, not so much a part, because it relates less to the content and much more to the structure of his thought, an underlying logic. A way of ordering the world for himself and finding his own place in it.
And of course, the order of the world, the order sometimes of unorderable things, the ordering of our own existence: these problems occupy our minds and shape all of us – some more explicitly and inherently than others. To Lukas, the nature of this problem is fundamental and occupies a great part of his mind and behavior, chief amongst them his artistic expression.
In this way, this work is the self-reference of a "desperate" order of his own existence and its shelving in the world. But less in the sense of a tragic futility as in that of a permanent – and above all productive – doubt of whether the current order can be the right one. Knowing that it never can be.
And I am sure that Lukas will be building another new shelf soon.