

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

More than meets the eye is an apt description of the fascinating instance in technical photography when, with the help of a technical eye, something ordinarily imperceptible to the human eye can be seen—and therefore perceived, taken to be real, and consequently believed. The vital question therefore, is who sees what, when, and with what. As both an analog or digital medium, what does photography see, what does it reveal that the human eye does not and simply cannot see? The age-old driving force behind the human gaze and an inquiring mind is the persistent and almost childlike curiosity to explore everything and render it visible, to illuminate every hidden corner, to capture it, and—no less importantly—to understand it through touch, too. This is analogous to microscopy on the micro scale or conversely on the macro scale, as can be seen in the open source images of stars captured by Thomas Ruff with professional telescopes, for example.

But, one may ask, what exactly is this instant, this snapshot in which an object—or more specifically a projectile—pierces an object, penetrates something or someone, destroying both the protective shell or skin and the thing itself, ultimately killing and murdering it. Martin Klimas' photographs address a particularly extreme moment, an ultra-brief instant, a millisecond, quicker than the blink of an eye and thus completely invisible to the lethargic human eye. The shattering of the vase shows the transitory moment between before and after, one seven-thousandth of a second that depicts the exact transition between intact object and total destruction. For Klimas it is not at all about destroying or killing something, or triggering death with a symbolic shot, however. With the aid of photography, a shot in reality is equally a shot in the imaginary.

Indeed, Martin Klimas plays with conceptions of genre such as “still life” and its connotations of the vanitas style, as well as the term “snapshot,” which is associated with the medium of photography. It is precisely from this visualized contradiction that the pictures draw their magical allure.

High-speed photography is the magic formula that astounds us by allowing the infinitesimally minuscule moment in which a projectile penetrates an object to become visible in full size. Klimas' work, however, is not just this ultra-slow high-speed photography, like those famous photographs of apples being shot by projectiles. Here, the lens of the camera is open, and Martin Klimas takes the photograph in the dark; the flash is triggered by the sound of the shot. The flash of light creates the visible picture—both real and imaginary—in this one seven-thousandth of a second.

The vase is pierced, and the projectile causes the water within it to spray outward like an explosion; for a millisecond the beautiful blooming flower remains in its upright position. The vanitas style and the old still life genre prevail and implode at the moment of the shot, the flash of light, and the brief exposure of the film for the photograph that will be developed. With his photographs Martin Klimas impressively visualizes photography's mechanism of action, which is based on light and time, or, more precisely, the exposure time. The camera is simply too slow to take these pictures—the flash first generates the image of a reality that otherwise lies in complete darkness.

We recognize these kind of vases from our everyday life, and enjoy them and their flowers everywhere; they allow the extinguished life of a cut flower to last for a longer period of time due to the water reservoir in the vase, thus sharing it with us and enabling us to experience happiness in the form of natural splendor. A bullet from a weapon is a very specific object of power that can penetrate a body, as we know, but it generally has no positive connotations and is a great deal stranger and scarier to us than a flower, which is a symbol of joy, splendor, blossoming, and life.

In these very impressive photographs by Martin Klimas, our gaze, perception, and mood oscillate somewhere between the splendor of flowers and the slowly transient beauty of nature on the one hand and the bang, explosion, and sudden destruction on the other. The connotations of the colors, with red as blood and danger to the point of death, and green and blue as the intrinsic colors of nature—the sea and the earth—allude to further emotional levels of our cultural memory. However, it is the huge variety of flowers that gives Martin Klimas an infinite number of possible combinations of plants and vases. This explains his serial approach. The colors are used more aesthetically, in the sense of a meaningful connection between the vase and the flower, although the vases are finite and cannot be used again.

The flower, the vase, and the background are the clear parameters that Martin Klimas must decide with regard to the finished image: the shot harbors the moment of surprise, dissolving the static composition and granting the final image its expressive gesture. In the digital age, Martin Klimas' images are completely analog. One shot, one picture. His concept of capturing a moment by means of the relationship between time and light offers the medium of photography a brilliant and sovereign presence: we objectively and vividly witness an imperceptible moment of reality, an explosive process, which in its brutal dynamics is the invisible beauty of a frozen moment of reality not graspable with one's own eyes. Something had to be sacrificed to achieve this, for a photograph is taken—with light, against decay, to last forever. Martin Klimas leaves us speechless with amazement and allows us to look into the artificial eye with a newfound respect for nature in all its fragility.

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