

Image, Reality and Staging

Of course, the context is altogether different and the medium itself is also essentially not comparable. Moreover, a good forty years separate Louis Malle's almost six-hour long TV documentary *L'Inde fantôme* and Mario Pfeifer's film shot in Mumbai and now showing at the NKV (Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden): *A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue* will be presented there as a video projection on three screens. Be that as it may, the thematic and formal relationship is evident. And yet prior knowledge of this kind is by no mean a prerequisite. It doesn't hurt to know that *Yet Untitled* [*"Pieces of Nature"*] documents a casting, but at its heart it features Jeff Wall's photographic work *Picture for Women* as a point of reference which for its part refers to Manet's painting *Un bar aux Folies Bergère*. Pfeifer restages Wall's work so precisely and at the same time randomly using the moving image. However, referencing iconic films and photographs from the sixties and seventies – as Pfeifer's first museum-based solo exhibition in Wiesbaden clearly demonstrates – is never an end in itself, a simple remake or a mere play on a famous name for this graduate of the Städelschule (b. 1981). In each of his works by contrast, Pfeifer reposes the fundamental question regarding the relationship between reality and staging, the image and its reflection, as well as the fault line that traverses this very terrain. This is also true in *A Formal Film in Nine Episodes* (2010) – which is only superficially documentary but actually has a disrupted narrative – as well as *Yet untitled*. This is even more so in the case of Pfeifer's cinematic engagement with Lewis Baltz's famous photographic series, *The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California*. Using two 16 mm projectors, we see a hand leafing through Baltz's book of photographs whilst a juxtaposed, unedited tracking shot explores one of the buildings, until finally both projections almost merge into one image. However, what we see are two fundamentally different stagings of one and the same reality taken from different perspectives: on the one hand in clear, objective and occasionally abstract external photographs and on the other, animated as it were over thirty-five years later, by a voiceover commentary by a former factory owner discussing the overall socio-economic context. Ultimately, all of this is simply, but also quite marvellously done.

- Christoph Schütte