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BEREND STRIK

THIXOTROPY

7 AUGUST - 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

Stephane Simoens is pleased to present the new solo exhibition by Berend Strik. The exhibition's title, *Thixotropy*, originates in chemistry, and describes the property exhibited by certain gels of becoming liquid when stirred or shaken. It is an apt metaphor for the effect of Berend Strik's idiosyncratic visual practice on the realm of the photograph and that of the world of imagery at large, which constitute such a significant part of the contemporary collective subconscious.

Strik impacts and delicately thwarts this visual culture, tackling the image head-on, and explores, expands and reconfigures it, whilst gently coercing it to respond to his own visual demands. He releases the photograph from its fixity and gives it back the tactility and specificity it lost with the onset of the instant reproducibility (and a concurrent loss of materiality) of digital culture. Originally Strik used found (more anonymous) photographs, ranging from architectural scenes to pornography, to personal family photographs. These in turn led to him wanting to record a more subjective experience, by means of what the artist calls snapshot photography. He nevertheless continually annuls that idiom's immediacy, by intervening with the painstaking, labour-intensive process of sewing and embroidery. Some works, especially the larger works, are by necessity carefully planned; the smaller ones are interfered with more intuitively. Both processes lead to a different potential emotional charge in the image.

Strik's work is complex. Located somewhere between the surface of the picture plane and its unravelling, Strik's process engenders countless new possibilities. With delicacy, tactility and a deliberate boldness, Strik never shies away from puncturing the photographic image through concealment, displacement and accentuation. He reveals the image's immense fragility, embroidering it with coloured threads and applying velvety and veil-like materials onto its plane. The eye, accustomed to wandering unawares into the space of photographic illusion (and apparently faithful representation), is instead met on the surface by threads, rebuffed by softness and colour set against the accustomed black & white photograph. The viewer is thereby led on a wholly different course of visual discovery. The eye is surprised, mystified, deceived, bewildered. The work thereby stirs up a whole plethora of narrative possibilities out of the given image's "still" starting point, a dynamic that gives the image a compelling three-dimensionality of meaning. The subject matter of the images used is point for needlepoint stirred and taken for a walk in possibilities. With an almost neutral gaze, the artist's actual subject matter - collected during travels, verging on social commentary whilst remaining at a personal scale, that of the artist's own eye- is brought right back to that age-old crux, the intersection between the dynamics of vision and meaning. As such the work's complete resonance and implications are hard to fathom in a single reading.

Berend Strik successfully extracts the photograph from its reproducibility, that inexorable wave of mute duplication, a transparency that has grown exponentially in our visual cultures since the onset of digital media, and gives it back its specificity and tactility. He also irrevocably alters it: the result is hard to reproduce in print; it compels a physical encounter, implying locality: this work demands to be seen. In such a first-hand, analogue experience, the work appeals to the viewer's sense of touch as well as of vision. Both separate and as a whole, these works unfurl in a vibrancy that is Berend Strik's delightful visual polyphony.

On the occasion of the opening "*Thixotropy*", a new, extensive publication on Berend Strik's practice, published by Valiz, will be presented.