



desto weiß ich doom zu sein

Young Art from Münster

With Sujin Bae, Ilsuk Lee, Valentino Magnolo, Irina Martyshkova
und Yoana Tuzharova

28 August to 14 November 2021

After the Kunststiftung DZ Bank sponsored an exhibition at KIT – Kunst im Tunnel for the first time in 2019, this year *desto weiß ich doom zu sein* (“The more I know to be doom”) is featuring works by five artists associated with the University of Fine Arts Münster. One focus of the bank’s art collection has been on photographic forms of expression since 1945, which demonstrate that photography is a profoundly artistic and diverse medium. The conception of this exhibition was based on an equally open-minded view of the photographic.

The word “doom” in the title, which rhymes with “zoom,” reflects the feeling of distress that is becoming increasingly common in our turbulent world. At the same time, the grammatical incorrectness and special melody of this quasi-sentence quickly become entangled in our mind, as does the playful approach to an exhibition that was a challenge for all five artists during lockdowns and the closing of art academies. The title emerged during the early weeks of preparations for the exhibition in the artists’ first joint Zoom chat. Ilsuk Lee wrote: “The more I know about science, the more I know to be doom.” The more consciously we engage with the world, the more questions we ask ourselves. This realization triggers a kind of vertigo that we can also experience when walking through the exhibition. The artists show photographic positions that confront, mix up, and reconfigure pre-determined expectations about photography. While defying discipline divisions fields such as painting, sculpture, and printmaking, they experiment with photography, its expressions and newly emerging possibilities.

As graduates of and students at the University of Fine Arts Münster, Sujin Bae, Ilsuk Lee, Valentino Magnolo, Irina Martyshkova, and Yoana Tuzharova are shaped by their immediate environment at the academy, personal and family life, their exchanges with other artists, and their experiences in the modern world with its flood of images. They are presenting a combination of older works and works created specifically for the exhibition at KIT, whose broad spectrum also reflects the diversity of contemporary artists’ engagement with the medium of photography: digital, precisely composed works contrast with the magical graininess of analog photography, and fine silk fabrics contrast with the hard coolness of ornamental tiles. The artists do not allow themselves to be limited by their media, and instead choose them freely based on their material. They engage with their own body and its traces in the analog and digital environment, explore philosophical and scientific constructs that determine the world we know, and show us that, in their delicacy and stillness, everyday observations can reveal a tremendous poetry if we allow them to.

Sujin Bae (*1984) works together with her partner, often in settings that they design themselves, which are then used for performances and films. The exhibition includes stills from her films. Three light boxes show excerpts from the work *Widow* from the series *Song for the Majestic Death* (2019): They direct our gaze in intimate proximity to the finger, the eye, and the mouth of a widow who tries to position herself on the death of her husband. We do not know whether she succeeds: In this installation, Bae focuses exclusively on the individual limbs of the woman, who is paralyzed by grief, thus suggesting the physical effects of the loss

of a loved one. The background to the work is the in-depth examination of dances of the dead from the European Middle Ages, in which the personification of death discusses the doomed person's imminent end with them. This story is also taken up in the small lenticular picture *Her (47, widow) bedroom*, which, depending on the viewing angle, shows a flickering portrait of the widow and her yellowed-pink bedroom. We wonder: Is this her place of refuge or a danger that threatens to devour her? While each image in the film replaces its predecessor, which passes by in a fraction of a second, the photograph becomes a selected moment. Bae invites us to savor it and find our own stories for her protagonist.

In her analog works, the artist indulges in spontaneity and dispenses with plans. She carefully scans, layers, and transforms the resulting (apparent) snapshots. Ultimately, each picture pays homage to the subtleties of the photographic process, and shows glimpses of her personal surroundings, natural scenery, or views of the city. Sujin Bae then creates sober journalistic or dark gothic arrangements out of the motifs. Their colors seem to glow, and the silhouettes of flowers and high-rises from the 1970s shimmer as in a fever dream and leave ghostly traces on the retina.

Ilsuk Lee (*1986) studied photography in his hometown of Seoul before beginning his studies at the University of Fine Arts Münster. Since then, he has been searching for “the truth that is unique, infinite, and unchangeable, and thus perfect.”¹ In other words, he seeks answers to major questions about the origins, structure, and development of the world—in full awareness that this goal is unattainable. His experimental approach is apparent in his sculptural as well as his photographic works. They lend new meaning to Susan Sontag's claim that photography turns every picture into an object:² When looking at his clearly formulated photographs, in which light particles and waves form fine patterns against the cosmos-dark black, the question arises: What am I seeing here? It is a question that is never easy to answer in Ilsuk Lee's work. He conducts his research into philosophy, the laws of physics, and the universe by building moving light sculptures and other complex installations and then imbuing them with a concentrated formal language in his photographs.

The portrait *Die absolute, relative und digitale Welt* shows the artist himself with a raised hand in a gray toga, floating between absolute black and white. From a distance, the image can be viewed as a unit, but on closer examination, the pixelization of his body becomes apparent: all consistency dissolves. “Just like the universe,” says Lee. “In the macrocosm the universe looks continuous. But in the microcosm the universe is discontinuous.” He illustrates the uncertain relationship between things in the universe by highlighting their differences—the difference between plan and chance, light and dark, reality and its image. Herein lies the almost magnetic power of his works: They flatter our gaze, attract it, and lure it into their black depths.

The hermaphrodite from Greek mythology originated as a male form of Aphrodite, but later developed into an independent character, the child of Aphrodite and Hermes. **Valentino Magnolo** (*1990) used digital, royalty-free bodies from the Internet to build his own modular version of this mythical figure: the morphed “aresfrodita,” the god of war Ares and the goddess of love Aphrodite united not at all seamlessly in a single figure. The divisions, cuts, and overlaps are clearly visible: in some parts the surface is matte white, and in others it shimmers transparently under a ray of sunlight. On the one hand, the production of the parts using 3D printing, which can take up to 21 days, emphasizes the process as an important part of the artwork, and on the other hand the temporal dimensions of the production are reminiscent of the similarly long exposure times in the early days of photography. This is not the only aspect of Magnolo's connection to photography: he draws his content from the Internet and from image editing programs such as Photoshop, or uses his own photographs to create 3D models using photogrammetry. The triptych *la prima cena* gathers material from the past eight months in a kind of photographic archive and blends it with the interfaces and symbols of the photo editing programs. The digital processes on which the work *senza titolo* is based are transferred into analogue space by being painted over by the artist using screen printing or an automated acrylic pen, sometimes with naive imagery.

¹ Ilsuk Lee, 2021.

² Susan Sontag: *On Photography*, p. 1.

The ancient sculpture, whose rigid gaze looks down on us from above, is a product of modern technologies that Magnolo created out of immaterial digital content instead of carving stone like the ancient masters. The mythologically non-existent and newly constructed Aresphrodite acts as a simulacrum of the original ancient objects and thus has the potential to “reveal something that remained invisible—or incomprehensible—in the natural object.”³

Irina Martyshkova's (*1987) artistic practice is based on the three pillars of painting, graphics, and photography. Art-historical and painterly references and fascinations – for instance, with Caravaggio's chiaroscuro painting style—come to light in her photographs when a yellow, withered houseplant behind dirty windows develops a dubious magic, as perhaps only things that have been carelessly discarded or subtly damaged can. In general, it is these supposedly everyday moments that Martyshkova seeks out with her camera and captures in their grandiose dejection, trivial ruin, and familiar poetry. When such a moment presents itself, it is “like an addiction” (Martyshkova): she cannot get it out of her mind; she absolutely must capture it. “This is photography: having a camera in your mind, thinking photographically,”⁴ Hans Windisch writes, thus describing something that is very evident in Irina Martyshkova's photographs.

At KIT she is showing, among other things, works that she created during her six-month residency at the Cité des arts in Paris. This period was marked by the strict lockdown in France and influenced her view of the city: “If you only have an hour to go for a walk, then you start to look at things differently. The light was special. I saw new, unfamiliar structures and patterns.” These different surface structures, patterns, and colors seem to form their own series of works. For example, the warm, soft baby pink of frozen persimmon fruits is continued and altered elsewhere with an uncanny flesh-pink pressure mark on a knee. This visual commonality runs through a total of twenty-nine works—sometimes more and sometimes less apparently.

The permeability inherent in Martyshkova's photographs is refined in the work *Untitled (asphalt)*: a hard, porous asphalt surface was printed on extremely delicate silk fabric and thus finds its way out of the two-dimensional (though seemingly three-dimensional) and back into objecthood. The unsewn edges cause the motif to radiate into the space, whose gray, exposed concrete walls take up the materiality of the picture and contrast with it.

The texture of this concrete does not escape the careful gaze: The traces of the wooden boards in which it was cast leave subtle impressions of knots and rings. **Yoana Tuzharova** (*1986) noticed this detail when she designed her installation *data monument* for the exhibition. The artist has engaged with traces for several years and wanted to continue this process at KIT. In her works she makes visible something that is easily overlooked every day on what is probably our most frequently used possession: grease streaks and swipe marks that are left on our smartphone display while we are chatting, emailing, shopping, and liking. These painterly-looking and yet automated gestures are traces of our everyday life—or rather, traces of the interface between the digital and physical world. At the same time, they are the origin of digitality, in which decisions are made in fractions of a second with just the press of a thumb.

data monument translates virtual structures into an analog space: the walls and niches, which correspond to the scale of artist's body, can be interpreted in many ways. While at first it clearly appears to be a facade, we soon realize that we are standing in front of a display window in which what lies behind it is staged in a certain context. The other side consists of an interior that is decorated with ornamental tiles that are perhaps reminiscent of a thermal bath, a place of luxurious refuge. The smooth, hygienic blue surface of the tiles contrasts starkly with the origin of the pattern, which comes from the traces of grease and dirt, lint and cracks in the bacteria-covered glass of the smartphone display. The mimetic reflection of forms oscillates infinitely in arches reminiscent of church architecture, similar to the constantly growing parallel universe of the World Wide Web, which reflects the “real world,” deforms it, and then radiates back onto us out of screens.

³ Roland Barthes: “Die strukturalistische Tätigkeit,” in: *Kursbuch*, 5 May 1966, p. 190–196.

⁴ Hans Windisch: “Sehen,” 221 (in *Camera scriptura: Die Bildschriftlichkeit der Fotografie*, p. 173).

In the tapering space, an effect is created that ranges from associations with holidays to symbols that are linked with fascism. The analog movements were photographed by Tuzharova and digitally printed on lengths of fabric, thus reflecting the thematic contrasts that also exist in smartphones. We enter into a situation that can flip very quickly: from enjoyment to anxiety, from collective to individual, from symbol to system.

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