HELMHAUS ZÜRICH

13 November 2009 – 17 January 2010

*WORLD –
IMAGES 3*

Peter Bialobrzeski (*1961 in Wolfsburg; lives in Hamburg)
Andrea Gohl (*1970 in Thalwil; lives in Zürich)
Maia Gusberti (*1971 in Bern; lives in Bern and Cairo)
Jitka Hanzlová (*1958 in Náchod, Czech Republic; lives in Essen)
Arno Hassler (*1954 in Donat; lives in Crémines and Zürich)
Alfredo Jaar (*1956 in Santiago, Chile; lives in New York)
Andreas Seibert (*1970 in Wettingen; lives in Tokyo)
Guy Tillim (*1962 in Johannesburg; lives in Cape Town)

In 2005 and 2007, Helmhaus Zürich presented the first and second parts of its *World – Images* exhibition series. The project now continues with the third part, accompanied, as always, by a publication. One of the main aims of this project is to find out more about the different ways in which artists transpose their views of the world into the medium of photography, especially in an age of media overkill. The exhibition, curated by Andreas Fiedler and Simon Maurer, shows a vibrant cross-section of contemporary photography.

World – Images 3 covers a range of individual visual worlds and worldviews. Each of the eight artists featured in this exhibition has a distinctive approach in terms of creative expression, subject matter and in terms of the social and geographic setting that is the focus of their work. Which worldviews are conveyed in the visual worlds of these artists? The answer to that question lies in the works themselves, some of them entirely new and all of them selected in close consultation with the artists themselves.

As the Zurich-based photographer Daniel Schwartz's well-received exhibition *Travelling through the Eye of History* and Ursula Biemann's video essays on the subject of mobility and migration so clearly showed when they were shown recently at Helmhaus Zürich, artistic images can enhance, deepen and even change our knowledge of the world. In the same spirit, the *World – Images* series seeks to present artistic "knowledge of the world" for debate within the setting of an art institution. Art, in this case photography, is a means of shaping our world view.

The title itself indicates a wide playing field: every image, after all, is a *World - Image*. Needless to say, a project like this cannot possibly offer encyclopaedic coverage. Each exhibition, and each accompanying publication, contains a broad, contrasting and at times contradictory

variety of exemplary artistic positions. On the whole, the three parts of the project so far have extended the scope of the survey in both form and content, adding new dimensions and deeper insights.

The photographs in this exhibition address their own inherent possibilities – and impossibilities: the possibility of making a statement about the world, presenting it and interpreting it. In short, these are photographs that investigate their own inherent truth. They openly call into question the characteristic properties of their own medium as an instrument of documentation and interpretation. They translate the world into the world of photography. And, as visual aids, they serve to translate the world of photography back into the world around us in all its bewildering simultaneity of disparity.

Images of all manner of events are available to us today in almost boundless quantities. The very fact that images in the mass media are instrumental in shaping the way we see and perceive the world was reason enough for us to include, for the first time, an artistic oeuvre that draws upon the picture archives of the mass media and integrates the images found there into other, new works.

For his five-part series *Searching for Africa in Life*, the New York based Chilean artist **Alfredo Jaar** took the covers of *Life* magazine from the years 1936–1996 and arranged them chronologically. The motto of the magazine, founded in 1936, was ambitious: "to see life; see the world". But what life? And which world? Alfredo Jaar, for whom art is always invariably also an instrument of political enlightenment, not only poses the now-familiar question of whether we are confronted with too many pictures; he also suggests we may be confronted with too few, or even the wrong ones.

Asia's mega-cities are the focus of the two groups of works *Neon Tigers* and *Paradise Now* by **Peter Bialobrzeski**. Using a large-format camera, Bialobrzeski took his photographs in the early evening (artificial) light of such cities as Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Bangkok – often with exposure times as long as eight minutes. The urban landscapes are frozen in a strange artificiality, looking like digital worlds somewhere between our dreams and our nightmares.

The tiger economy of China's rapid transition from agricultural nation to modern industrialised society is fuelled by 150 million migrant workers – the biggest mass migration movement on the planet. Swiss photographer **Andreas Seibert** shows the socio-political dimension of that movement, focusing on the lives of individuals who are at the mercy of economic forces. What drives these people is their dream of a better life. But the pictures tell us that, in most cases, the dream is being handed down to the next generation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Brixton was seen as the gun and drug capital of England. Czech-born **Jitka Hanzlová**, who lives in Germany, photographed three generations of black women in this part of London. The oldest generation has seen how much Brixton has changed over the course of the past fifty years: children used to be able to play in the street. Now the street is potentially dangerous even for adults – a fact that is reflected in their faces.

Maia Gusberti was inspired to create her *Travel.Agencies* series when she noticed that many travel agencies in Cairo have maps of the world on their walls instead of glossy photographs of well-known holiday destinations. Often, these maps occupy a prominent position in the room, ideally placed for waiting customers to project their dreams.

Egypt is also the setting for **Arno Hassler's** photographs of the desert and the mega-city of Cairo. His 360° panoramas challenge the eye with their non-hierarchical representation of near and far, important and unimportant. Using a special panorama camera, Hassler photographs the world in such all-inclusive detail that his images seem to establish the ultimate reference-point of reality.

Pan-African freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba, assassinated by Belgian agents in 1961, had a dream: independence and just governance throughout the continent. In the images by South African photographer **Guy Tillim** that dream lives on in surroundings riven with contradictions. Tillim's photographs are like a psychogram of a continent torn between the deadlock of the past and the dynamism of the present, in search of a path that will lead out of the colonial heritage.

The classic cities of the western world – London, New York, Paris and Rome – form the stage and backdrop for Swiss photographer **Andrea Gohl's** urban walks. As she wanders through the city streets, the traces that she finds both confirm and contradict existing clichés. For the photographer, and for the medium itself, the city ultimately remains an inscrutable labyrinth of past and present, planning and chance.

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The exhibition will be accompanied by the third volume in the *World – Images* series. In keeping with the subject matter, the publication is lavishly illustrated and includes an introduction and texts on the individual artists' positions by freelance curator Andreas Fiedler (Bern) and Helmhaus director Simon Maurer. The book was designed by sofie's Kommunikationsdesign, Zurich and is distributed by Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg.

This time, Helmhaus Zürich has taken an interdisciplinary approach, linking the exhibition with other art forms in a special programme of events: Steinbrüchel and Nik Bärtsch will give two concerts in the room showing the works of Peter Bialobrzeski and Andreas Seibert. We hope that these events will promote a dialogue between the arts, encourage ways of working together and make the work more directly accessible. Helmhaus Zürich in collaboration with Juliana Müller plans to hold more such concerts in the future to offer our visitors a unique synaesthetic experience.

Music is not the only art form that will be introduced as a thought-provoking extension of the exhibition. The imagery of the word is another aspect that will take its place alongside the medium of photography, with Peter K. Wehrli reading from his legendary *Katalog von Allem* [Catalogue of Everything]. Cinema, too, will play a role: documentary filmmaker Villi Hermann, who accompanied Swiss photographer Andreas Seibert on his travels in China, will be showing his film *From Somewhere to Nowhere* at the Filmpodium in Zurich, shedding light on the background to Seibert's photographs of Chinese migrant workers. As ever, our authoritative guided tours and the accompanying catalogue will provide more in-depth information.