

Helmhaus Zürich  
23 September – 13 November 2011

## **WORLD IMAGES 4**

**Darren Almond** (\*1971 in Wigan, Great Britain; lives in London)  
**Edward Burtynsky** (\*1955 in St. Katharines, Ontario, Canada; lives in Toronto)  
**Georg Gatsas** (\*1978 in Grabs; lives in Waldstatt)  
**Aglaia Konrad** (\*1960 in Salzburg; lives in Brussels)  
**Uriel Orlow** (\*1973 in Zurich; lives in London)  
**Beat Streuli** (\*1957 in Altdorf; lives in Zurich and Brussels)  
**Mette Tronvoll** (\*1965 in Trondheim, Norway; lives in Oslo)  
**Ester Vonplon** (\*1980 in Schlieren; lives in Berlin, Zurich, Surselva)

**The images that we see meld into our image of the world. What visual worlds, what world images do artists show us in their photographs? The Helmhaus Zürich is presenting the fourth in its series of exhibitions and publications titled *World Images: a vibrant spectrum of current, international photography.***

The infectious commitment of the feelings on view covers a wide spectrum: beauty and horror are close neighbours; magical moonlit nights rub shoulders with man-made natural catastrophes; the camera eye ranges from Mongolia to megacities, from a remote valley in Switzerland to mining regions in Australia.

The invitation to the exhibition shows a picture from Uriel Orlow's series *Still Aftershock*: finely chiselled ornaments in an Armenian courtyard bespeak better times and stand in contrast to the rubble in the foreground. In 1988 one of the last century's most devastating earthquakes destroyed the heart of the textile industry in the Soviet Union. Promises of help poured in from all over the world. Then the region was shaken by another earthquake: the collapse of the Soviet Union. Past and present overlap in the picture: the area is still suffering from the aftershock of these seismic and political upheavals. The world's promises echo in the courtyard of reality.

In an age of visual overkill, how do artists translate their view of the world into the medium of photography? The exhibition *World Images 4* shows eight approaches, eight artistic variations in expression, subject matter, social focus and geographical location. The fourth in the series now follows the first three presentations of 2005, 2007 and 2009. Seen as a whole, considerable depth of field, both in form and content, marks the four exhibitions and accompanying publications, co-curated by Andreas Fiedler and Simon Maurer.

The internationally renowned artists represented in *World Images 4* are relatively new to Switzerland: the Austrian Aglaia Konrad, an artist who left her stamp on the memorable documenta X; Edward Burtynsky, whose environmental concerns have attracted the notice of art, science and politics in North America; Darren Almond, who was represented at the legendary London exhibition *Sensation*, and the Norwegian Mette Tronvoll, whose series of portraits are increasingly attracting critical attention. Two young Swiss practitioners are included as well: Ester Vonplon (31) and Georg Gatsas (33), each contributing their own distinctive interior views. Uriel Orlow has contributed to the Swiss presentation at this year's Venice Biennale and Beat Streuli's inimitable oeuvre is already inscribed in the history of photography. For their work, much of it produced

especially for the exhibition, the artists have chosen widely divergent forms of presentation from conventionally framed pictures and projections to space-filling installations.

In the first gallery viewers encounter over 50 pictures projected wall-to-wall in *Quai de l'Industrie 09*, a series made by **Beat Streuli** in Brussels. Unnoticed and using a powerful telephoto lens, Streuli took pictures of drivers stuck in traffic. Completely absorbed and lost in thought, they feel unobserved in the anonymity of the crowd and have no need to strike photogenic poses.

Oslo-based **Mette Tronvoll** takes an entirely different approach when she photographs elite troops in Norway's forests or Mongolian nomads in their yurts. The individuals themselves decide on how they wish to pose for the camera. Tronvoll's gaze is objective and sober, yet at the same time palpably empathetic. In relation to Beat Streuli's works in the first room, this second room raises a key question of portrait photography: to pose or not to pose? What is behind the mask? What can we really tell about someone from a photograph?

**Aglaia Konrad's** work makes a powerful statement about metropolitan architecture, from China to Brazil, from Senegal to France. It is a statement about the unruly breathlessness of our times. Her metre-long installations of greatly enlarged black-and-white photographs cover the walls, windows and ceilings of gallery spaces, overwhelming the visitors. Photography reclaims the third dimension. Konrad's meta-architecture within the model space of the museum oscillates between reality and illusion.

In the next room, **Uriel Orlow** shows dilapidated architecture. In his four-part work *Still Aftershock*, created especially for the exhibition, he looks at what has become of the Armenian town of Leninakan some twenty years after the devastating earthquake and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Orlow relies on the evocative force of his images to draw attention to a region riven by natural catastrophe and political upheaval, and now all but forgotten by the world.

*Signal the Future* by **Georg Gatsas** immerses us in the atmosphere of London's dubstep subculture. As a political movement, this music does not draw its power from the rejection of prevailing values but from something altogether different and new: a bass-heavy electronic sound that brings people from all ethnic backgrounds together. It shows the potential of multiculturalism as the flipside of the so-called Blackberry riots that swept through England so recently.

This intimate insider view of a social movement is countered in the next room by a very different kind of interior view: the other world that we find in the works of **Ester Vonplon** took place a lifetime ago and has survived in its entirety – a newspaper dated 1946 on the table, the dishes set out as though the people who lived there had just left the room. We are in a Swiss mountain village on the shady side of the mountain, opposite the high-amenity tourist resorts on the other side. Ester Vonplon shows how time stands still at the heart of Europe.

Canadian photographer **Edward Burtynsky** has devoted his life's work to examining the dilemma between unbridled prosperity and its impact on the environment. His images are scientific documents, eco-political arguments and art in one. They lead us into unfamiliar realms of which we know nothing, yet from which we profit on a daily basis: oilfields and refineries, for instance. Burtynsky shows man's exploitation of the world's natural resources with a candour as sober as it is blunt.

In the last room, we find a very different view of landscape. British artist **Darren Almond** has spent many years photographing carefully chosen landscapes by full moon. The moon bathes everything in a diffuse light, in faded colours that both veil and disclose. The deserted landscapes often appear almost mystical and transcendent – moments of fleeting beauty. The long exposure times reveal what is normally hidden to the eye.

The pictures in this exhibition also explore their own potential – and lack of potential: the potential of photography to say something about the world, to depict it and interpret it. The pictures are visual aids in translating the world of photography back into the world around us with its

bewildering simultaneity of difference: we are mirrored in the other, in the alien, in order to learn more about the world.

The exhibition is accompanied by the fourth volume in the series *World Images*. In keeping with its subject matter, the **book** is lavishly illustrated, with an introduction and texts on each contributing artist by freelance curator Andreas Fiedler (Bern) and Simon Maurer, director of the Helmhaus Zürich. The publication was designed by sofie's Kommunikationsdesign, Zurich, and is distributed by Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nuremberg.

**Ancillary events** take an interdisciplinary approach, relating the exhibition to other cultural sectors. The documentary film *Manufactured Landscapes* by Jennifer Baichwal, shown at the Filmpodium, follows Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, represented in our exhibition, to China. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the "awe-inspiring [film] stimulates the senses and the conscience simultaneously". To capture diversity and make room for difference is a crucial curatorial objective in mounting the exhibition series *World Images*. As such, the exhibition will be a platform in October for a dialogue between migration specialist Dr. Mark Terkessidis from Berlin and journalist Kaspar Surber from St. Gallen, who will explore social and political perspectives on immigration under the title *Potential instead of Problems* (discussion in German).

Since *World Images 3*, two concerts have been organized for every exhibition at the Helmhaus Zürich. For the current exhibition, programme director Juliana Müller has engaged two singers: Saadet Türköz, the daughter of a Kazakh family from East Turkestan, grew up in Istanbul. Her musical spectrum ranges from her native Kazakh folk music to free jazz. Nils Wogram, on the trombone, will accompany the virtuoso improvisation of Saadet Türköz's *Song Dreaming*. The voice in the second concert knows no boundaries. Bruno Amstad from Lucerne has an extraordinary vocal spectrum. He creates an inimitable sound, linking musical influences from a diversity of cultures. Using loop devices he superimposes vocal lines as sound settings for his improvisations.

Guided tours for adults and children and the accompanying publication are available for in-depth study. For further details see the enclosed invitations.