

STEFFI KLENZ



"There's joy in repetition," Prince sang, repeatedly, on "Joy in Repetition". But as that other pop-culture icon, Sigmund Freud, pointed out, repetition is also a way of dealing with a very different state of being—trauma—a theme investigated in the work of East German-born, London-based photographic artist Steffi Klenz. Words: Robert Shore.



He Only Feels the Black and White of It (Mimi Books, 2016) is a meditation on political separation which takes as its principal subject a hole in the Berlin Wall and the efforts made to repair it by border guards on 14 July 1972. It consists of a single news image, reproduced in around 100 black-and-white screenprinted variant states, and accompanied by fragments of text. Why did you choose that particular picture?

I was selected as one of twenty-three photographic artists to participate in the book publication *Rights of Passage* for the 2015 Venice Biennale. The overarching themes were territory and boundaries and how those have changed significantly over the course of human history. I felt compelled to make work about the one border that had shaped my own family and myself

the most—the Berlin Wall. I found a 1972 Associated Press photograph that presents a section of the Berlin Wall as damaged. West German civilians had attacked it after hearing guns being fired at fleeing East Germans. The archive image pictures East German military guards and border policemen repairing the Wall. When I encountered the image, I was amazed by how loaded that opening in the wall was and I started to refer to it as a "mar-mar". The more time I spent with the archive image, the more I came to realize that it defined me more than I had anticipated.

What did you do to it to produce the variant states shown in the book? Over the last few years I have been very interested in exploring themes of repetition in relation to the photographic notion of seriaty. For the

book, I used the 1972 archive photograph to make multiple screenprinted images. I am particularly interested to explore the moment when a photographic image fails to communicate as an index so I produced screenprints that effectively are not complete. Each print is different from the next and the reader can see the "complete" image only in its fragmented parts.

*Where did you find the source image for your series *Beim (2014-15)*, and what made you want to reconfigure it? I was invited by Brad Feuerhelm to work with his private photographic archive based in London. The body of work began with an Associated Press image of the concentration camp in Ohrdruf in former East Germany, which I culled from his collection. When I encountered*

the image, I was amazed how ordinary the actual architectural space of the concentration camp was. I kept asking myself: How can a "wooden shed" be loaded with such significance? Really, the archive image found me. On the one hand, my own family history is tragically shaped by the events of World War II and, on the other hand, I felt compelled, as if I were expected to respond to such an image due to my German historical guilt, to be a "good German".

In fact, you didn't simply manipulate an original. You made an elaborate recreation of the scene and photographed that. Why? I kept thinking that "everybody knows" this type of image and for me this became an important part of the work. The camp is no longer there and I will never be able to

—RECONSTRUCTION OF DESTROYED WALL SECTION, 14 JULY 1973—



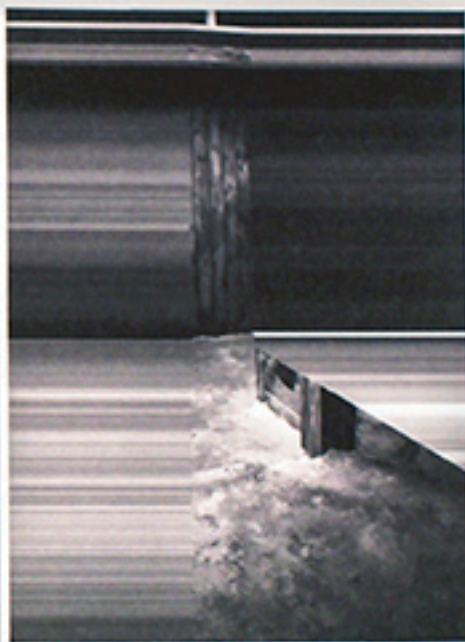
My mother reminds Wolfgang that it is better to have a sick heart than none. "Till it starts to break" Wolfgang replies.

Previous page, left
Portrait by Benjamin
Mulliken, Southbank
Centre, London
Sept 2008

Previous page, right
Untitled
From the series *Flow*
2004-05

This page
From *We Only Feel the
Pain & Whore of It*
Wolfgang, 2008

Opposite page
Untitled
From the series *Flow*
2004-05



visit it to really know. Rebuilding an exact replica of the space in the studio became an opportunity for me to spend time with the architectural space—a form of "privatization". I regarded this process as my possibility to "actually" visit this otherwise "remote" space and spend actual time with it. In that way it really started to feel like I was communicating through a space that I was familiar with. This disquieting balance between the "convincingly real" and the "strangely artificial" became very much part of constructing the life-size model in the studio as well as it filtered through to the production of the final images in the series.

Different digital codes, which transform and erase the information of the image, were then applied to the digital image. This process

resulted in the deformation of the image and created several fragmented versions of the same image. The image becomes fractured, ruptured, deformed and disfigured. By transmuting the image, I create several fragmented versions of the same image. *Flow* forces the viewer to hover over each individual image in order to combine all the fragments into one image. Collapsing time and space, the images re-emerge as the same, yet-not-quite-the-same, photograph: very recognizable and strangely out of reach. For me repetition is not about repeating the same thing. It is about small differences. I feel that the images function like the action of a footnote referring the reader/viewer to another text or better detail within the image—a corpus within a corpus.

*How "random" is the series?
Are you ultimately its creator or its curator?*

A digital software engineer and myself created about fifty different digital versions of the same image. At the end, we selected the images in relation to one another. Each image is the space of revelation of particular details so that what is revealed in one image is concealed in another. Each image becomes both a space of presence and absence at the same time. In this digital age, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the producers, curators and the consumers of images. I wish to forge unexpected intervisual relationships, to make you look—and think—with this collection of assembled and at the same time appropriated photographs that

propose new readings of the original archive image. I think *Flow* has allowed me to work in between both the space of the curator and the creator. After all, I regard myself as working with the medium of photography as well as working with it.

The title *Flow* is an early seventeenth-century word for a theatre stage. A stage can present anything except itself; it needs an actor to animate it. In regards to my own work, I like the idea of the digital software programme functioning as an anonymous form of enactment for the space/stage I build. In the theatre the drama provides a narrative, but in *Flow* any such legible narrative is withheld.

"Sapings of a Door"
will run at London Gallery *Flow*
and will, January.