

Kunsthaus Glarus

Sam Pulitzer – *The Premise of a Better Life*

27.10.2019–01.01.2020

“Can you afford yourself?” “Are you waiting for a moment that won’t come?” Sam Pulitzer speaks directly to us, the viewers, with a series of photographs that are at the center of his exhibition at Kunsthaus Glarus. In addition to several generic, nonspecific landscapes and cityscapes, the images depict details of everyday things or places: a bouquet of flowers, a derelict shop, a sign, fresh-baked bread—observations of particular scenes and infrastructures, fetishized or almost comical objects the artist encounters as a resident of this city. These distanced, pedestrian, seductive, promising motifs serve as literal backdrops for the questions the artist poses. They are printed in subtitle style under the images on Plexiglass plates. For whom are they intended? Are they testing us, the audience? The artists and those interested in a particular attitude? Or are they a self-inquiry? If we think we have made out an addressee or a clear, critical position, the next questions—they mostly contain a contradiction—may well lead us off in a different direction again. The questions that accrue, which bring into play truisms regarding the relationship between the individual and society, between life and work, create a supposed intimacy. They are about potential individuality. What kind of life do we lead and what kind of life do you lead? How can we optimize it and in what ways do we want to improve it? *The Premise of a Better Life* (2019) is directed inward as well: not only to Sam Pulitzer, the individual, but perhaps to a nebulous “we,” which could be directed toward anyone. Under which material and political conditions are artists working today? What does artistic authorship mean in relation to the art market or a society in crisis for instance? The photographs portray New York almost without exception. The nondescript, rarely location-specific images do not seek to document the city, but to portray New York as a “sunken horizon,” a pale reflection of a model city, a center of attraction and a place of longing. Unique and yet exemplary, ostensibly universally relevant.

The second work in the exhibition follows here, also distributed around all rooms like *The Premise of a Better Life*. 1789: the French Revolution, a turning point in history. In the same year, Friedrich Schiller delivers his inaugural lecture

at the University of Jena on Universal History. *Años Perros* (2019) takes the same year as its starting point. Beginning here in a sequence of illustrated time periods indicated by names and terms leading up to the present day, Hegel, Ricardo and Robespierre first encounter one another. A philosopher, an economist, and a politician: important figures who have shaped the view of world history. The “dog years” are time periods of varying lengths that form a grid for a montage of a potential history (of ideas): concepts of power intersect with personalities, global arenas and economic and political slogans. The timeline beginning in the Schneelisaal on the ground floor and ending on the upper floor is actually a score for a soundtrack, a pop or rock song based on repetitions of simple-chord series we have to imagine. The work situates within an supposedly global context the urban dreariness of the economic and social conditions in New York, as captured by Sam Pulitzer in *The Premise of a Better Life*. The freestanding walls labeled with vinyl lettering, not unlike advertising panels, are based on a pedagogical format: shown alongside the timeline are either historical events or a biography. What appears elucidating at first glance turns out on closer inspection to be a subjective collection of notes or quotations, an associative, at times non-sensical map of the mind whose formally structured lines cannot be decoded linearly. Epigrammatic, concise and multilingual, they form a sequence of “subtitles” for a film; or perhaps the score is also the soundtrack to the likewise linear series of photographs. The texts are arranged in a visually distinct manner: from a distance the monochrome color surfaces of the reverse sides resemble advertisements or monumental book spines. Text also becomes image here where the writing or language is unfamiliar to us. The backsides of these freestanding walls are decorated with sketches for a plot. The universalistic narrative lines, the “big” (failed) ideas leading to the present time are supplemented with partly modified quotations and passages in which a first-person narrator is speaking. Here, the dog years may be part expression of an autobiographical lifetime, but again one so generic it could apply to all of us. Are these the golden years or the wasted years of a generation?

Sam Pulitzer, who is interested in literature and has developed his own writing practice over many years, uses his own texts in his works as well as quotes from literature, theory and pop culture. At first glance, his work with language and its legibility suggests accessibility. These montages, however, do not offer a clear narrative, but a complex, personal, at times satirical image of the present age and its promise. Some of the sources used are decoded, others are kept hidden or fictionalized and modified – reflecting how information is structured today. The intention of these gaps is not to exclude the viewer from meaning. Rather, they pose questions, such as who speaks for whom or how the personal relates to the public and thus implicitly how art and artists might adopt a critical political and social stance. The allegorical configurations of image and text depict hegemony and violence on a grand scale; on a macro level they dissect power relations within the art scene and our infrequent inability to escape these conditions of “inside” and “outside.”

Program

Sunday, October 27, 2019

2pm

Tour of the Schauddepot

3pm

Artist talk with Sam Pulitzer

Thursday, October 31, 2019

6pm

Public tour with Otto Bonnen

Sunday, November 10, 2019

4pm

Collection Picks I with Kaspar Marti,
president Glarner Kunstverein

Sunday, November 17, 2019

2pm

Kids' afternoon

Sunday, December 1, 2019

4pm

Collection Picks II with Stefan Wagner,
staff member Kunsthaus Glarus

Wednesday, December 11, 2019

12:30–1:30 pm

Tour and lunch with Anne Gruber

Reserve your spot in advance:

office@kunsthausglarus.ch

through December 10, 2019