

Kunsthaus Glarus

Thomas Julier

Hunter in the Void

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In his work Swiss artist Thomas Julier investigates the nature of contemporary imagery. His films and photographs always depend on the method of their production and presentation, in which the devices used for recording and playback become an integral part of what is shown. The artist's most recent work deals with a medial constructed view of the animal. In other works, the camera examines human behavior. Forming the centerpiece of his first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland is an installation of motion-sensor cameras that create a kind of feedback loop. Bait is used to lure indigenous animals into the range of these cameras that are positioned inside and outside the Kunsthaus. These are hooked up to a system that records video when movement is detected. Live streams of these cameras-cum-traps are projected in the Oberlichtsaal. *Hunter in the Void* is based on the perspectives of the observer and the observed. Perforations in the glass panes of the Kunsthaus create openings in the building allowing animals free access throughout the exhibition period. The Kunsthaus becomes the camera apparatus, the animals artistic figures; their actual being evades the viewer. Light plays a central role in *Hunter in the Void*. The projections provide the exhibition's sole light source apart from the illumination of the decoy's infrared lights, which are visible to the viewer only in the video transmission. The system's cameras are adjusted to record only the infrared light sources in the room, which human and animal eyes do not detect, and not daylight. *Hunter in the Void* is an experiment for studying how animals interact with cameras, set within a specified daily rhythm. For this purpose Thomas Julier intervenes into the normal rhythm of the Kunsthaus: he changes the Museum's common opening times, adapting them relative to the sun's position. The Kunsthaus will be open at different times each day during twilight hours, from two hours before to two hours after sunset.

The photograph presented in the foyer, *Untitled, Rome, May 7, 16:39* (2016) spans the thematic spectrum explored in the installation *Hunter in the Void, Trap 1-8*: the architecture of the museum as camera apparatus. Configured as such, the museum generates a feedback loop in which the museum itself becomes the subject of observation, reflecting on how the viewer is conducted through the spaces. It also presents the historical characteristics of this machine of elucidation via the oppositional topoi of emptiness and density, light and dark, inclusion and exclusion. The cardboard bait boxes distributed throughout the spaces underline the emblematic character of the configuration here. Reminiscent of architectural models of modernist functional buildings, when supplied with bait they function as traps designed to lure animals inside from the surrounding environment. With *Hunter in the Void* the museum is also transformed into a living body, whose limbs, joints and organs are rendered visible. The animals—as the absent protagonists of this experimental configuration—serve as a figure that intimates the various narratives of the museum body and its viewer, or, more broadly, of a human-constructed gaze, which is made evident through the lens of the camera in particular.

The architecture of Kunsthaus Glarus—as with many other museums of its day—is informed by a utopian desire for transparency. Presented here without a specific objective, this experimental configuration picks up on the modernist idea of openness. Light plays a central role in this, linking together both ideas of the museum as an emblematic camera or body. But transparency also remains an utopian vision here, since viewers will rarely ever see whether animals actually enter the Kunsthaus. The encounter remains a possibility. As the glass between interior and exterior conveys, the media configuration is what determines the relationship between animals and humans. From the perspective of viewers, the image-traps presented in the space of the museum become sculptures that don't immediately reveal their function. Nevertheless, the ropes stretching from the ceiling to the spherical objects recall futuristic hunting instruments, in which the hunter is forced to aim into the void. As soon as the lured-in animals cause the image-traps to shake, their function of recording images is sabotaged and they are transformed into pendulums subject to the gravitational forces of the museum. Last but not least, it is the very technology linked to the observer's perspective that makes impossible the coming together of humans and animals and therefore any actual encounter. The installation makes visible an architectural and technological dispositif that merely insinuates the possibility of interaction between man and animals. The altering of the opening times intervenes in the normal operational functioning of the museum, which is inscribed in the material history of the building. The museum, built in 1952, was designed to operate without artificial lighting. The opening hours have been modified for the duration of the show to conform to a cosmic rhythm, setting forth the notion of

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a museum visit as a sensual and poetic experience. This sublime, anti-rationalist level of perception, the viewing of art, establishes a link to the use of natural light to create ideal conditions for the viewer, a concept that is already part of the history and architecture of the Kunsthhaus.

Other works in the exhibition focus on man's constructed and medialized view of cultural history or parade the human body before the camera as the subject of observation. The photo series *Distant Relatives* (2014–2016) consists of nine analog images of H&M advertisements for children's clothing. The photographs of the posing, childlike faces make clear in a latent, uncanny way that these promotional images are also about a constructed perspective, in this case what it means to be a child in a manner proceeding from what is natural and primary. Another series of photographs, distributed throughout the Kunsthhaus and emphasizing or duplicating various sensitive "corporeal elements" of the architecture, once again resuming the building's camera-like function, were created in various tourist spots around Italy. These original, photographic images are also informed by an interplay of light and the viewer's (photographer's) perspective of subject matter that appears inconsequential or incidental at first glance: details of a wall painting; a sculpture placed in a stairwell; a banner on the façade of a museum that is no longer legible in the glaring sunlight; a wall flanking the garden of a Roman museum. In the Schneelisaal, part of this series is installed in a strict, symmetrical fashion that seeks out various architectural reference points, creating a central axis in the space. Several photographs are hung on the partitions that were originally constructed for the museum when it was built and recently renovated by the artist for the exhibition. These suggest a unique architectural body within the existing architecture, and draw attention to the fact that the museum predetermines a constructed view of the objects located therein, which is entirely subject to a given era's particular tastes. The visual axes, which the strict spatial configuration dictates, not only emphasize the architectural body of the museum but also reconstruct the psychogeography of the Kunsthhaus.

Presented on the museum's basement level are two film-based works: *Center of Gravity* (2016) and *Caravaggio* (2016). Here the camera becomes the apparatus that dissects man's movements and habits. In *Center of Gravity* (2016), the gravitational forces of the Roman Metro establish a rhythm that not only sets the camera's perspective in motion but is also transmitted to the bodies of the people observed via the fingertips of their hands that are tightly clasping the support bars. In *Caravaggio* (2016) the camera observes tourists while viewing art in a church. The "institutional framing" of the church and the long-established knowledge of it determine how the art on display there is observed and valorized. Here, the behavior of those observed is also constructed through a medialized perspective, whereby the searching and focusing cameras, lacking an objective, are also lost in the emptiness, similar to the image-traps in *Hunter in the Void*.