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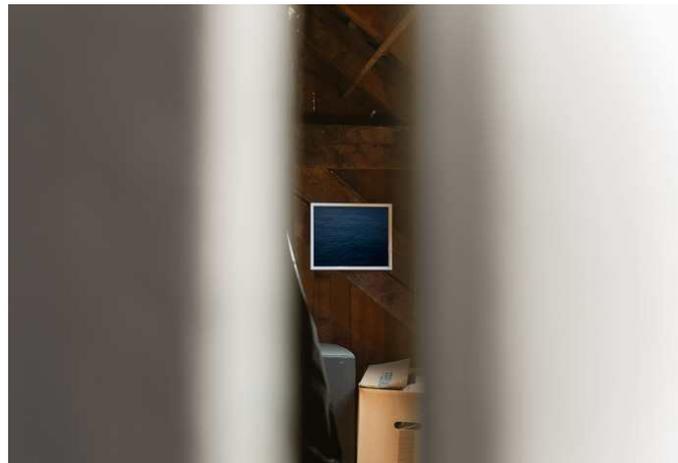
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Daniel Gustav Cramer

Seventy-Two Photographs, Seven Seconds Apart: An Interview with Daniel Gustav Cramer

Basel, Apr. 2014: Daniel Gustav Cramer is a Berlin-based artist. He has exhibited internationally at the Kunsthalle Mulhouse, France, Kunsthaus Glarus, Switzerland, Kunsthalle Lissabon, and many other international venues. His work, which can take the form of installations, printed matter, photography, and objects, deals mainly with memory.

Olga Stefan interviewed Daniel Gustav Cramer on the occasion of his recent exhibition at SALTS, Basel, 01-72.



Olga Stefan: It seems that in your artistic practice, time (the passage of) plays a very important role, sometimes as the actual subject and other times as a mere subtext, but always present somehow. Can you speak a bit about this preoccupation with “time” in your work?

Daniel Gustav Cramer: In my parents’ bedroom in our old holiday house near the coast of Belgium, there was a small reproduction of a painting on the wall, hung right above their bed. A man, a horse, a path, a few trees, a farm in the background overshadowed by clouds—possibly a

Scandinavian or Eastern European scene. As a boy, I would lie on my parents’ pillow and observe all its details. Years ago we sold the place. I never visited the area again. Today, when I think of the house and the dunes nearby, this picture pops up in my mind, and has actually become an inseparable part of that memory. At some point there was someone, a person I never knew, that painted a picture of a landscape from his imagination. This picture, after being reproduced and installed in a bedroom, became part of a memory, my personal memory of the landscape which has merged with the Belgian coast.

OS: The topic of time is also explored in your recent exhibition, 01-72, at SALTS in Basel. For this project, you took a series of seventy-two photographs of the same spot of water at one-minute intervals, thus recording a slight variation in color and light, but one almost invisible to the eye. You then hung each of these seventy-two photographs in seventy-two rooms of the building housing SALTS, including in the building’s other residences and their private spaces. In preparation for the project, you wrote a letter to the residents of the building asking their permission to penetrate into their private space. This letter is exhibited in the garage of SALTS. Tell me about the role of time in this multi-dimensional undertaking.

DGC: In this work there are several layers in which originally separate moments of time overlap and interlace. There is the experience of the work itself. When you enter the exhibition space, a room of approximately 200m², you find nothing but a small framed photograph of the surface of water on the left wall. This picture is the first one of the group, all taken one after the other in the minutes before sunrise. When you walk over to the guest toilet or the back room of the exhibition space, you will find a second picture, slightly different from the first, taken seven seconds later. The next one, perhaps the one in the gallery kitchen or in the heater room behind the project space, is another couple of seconds later. The distance between those documented moments corresponds somehow with the physical distance between the frames and rooms, the time it takes for you

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to walk from one to the next. At the same time though, while walking, you are aware that this documented line of time exists in the house and its spaces all at once, simultaneously. When you walk deeper into the house, up the floors, to the attic, in each room and corridor, which are quite different in their atmospheres, sizes and usage, you are always returning to the same scene, somewhere in the Mediterranean. You get the sense that through these photographs one can witness the changes and variations of the light reflected by the water's surface one morning in another place—and similar to snowflakes, no situation equals another. I wrote a letter to the tenants. I asked them to take part in the project. This letter, written in Berlin, sent to Birsfelden near Basel, forms another line between two locations. Also important for the project is the duration of the exhibition itself. This house, even though invisibly, is occupied by this work, and turns into a sculptural body for a certain amount of time. The cuts which mark the beginning and end are similarly sharp as those which mark the beginning and end of the water's surface in the Mediterranean. It begins and ends.



OS: The project 01-72 cannot be considered merely a photo exhibition. It can be argued that the photographs function as the glue in what has become a social sculpture, a project that brings together a small community of people and creates personal relations through art. How do you see this project and the role of the photographs themselves within it?

DGC: It is true, when installing the works and talking to the tenants and shop owners that live with the works, I realized that their participation is more than just a mere agreement. In the days I worked on the exhibition in the house, I enjoyed talking to the tenants and hearing their responses. In each corridor a single photograph would be placed, in between two entrance doors of two apartments. A part of the systematic hanging stipulated that the one photograph inside the flat behind the door to the left was taken seven seconds earlier, and another one, taken seven seconds after the one hung in the corridor, was placed behind the door of the flat to the right. Imagine someone standing inside his kitchen facing the scene of the rippling waves imagining a neighbor downstairs standing inside her kitchen with a picture taken a couple of seconds earlier. In the beginning I was mostly interested in the vagueness of the project itself, its character of remaining, even when installed, closer to a proposal than an experience—is this house actually turning into a sculpture? Do these images, placed in every single room actually connect the rooms, give them a certain kind of energy? I still cannot say. But I know that most tenants reacted very positively to the blue intruders.

OS: Were there any surprises or revelations about human relationships or about the impact of the project that you didn't consider beforehand?

DGC: A young man living on the third floor stopped me on the stairs in the basement. He was on his way to the laundry room. He mentioned that he counted the pictures he passed by from his bathroom, through his entrance room, the corridors, the stairs down to the basement, observing time rolling backwards. He had

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a discussion with another tenant asking him what he thought of the project: "I don't care. The pictures look pretty. But I don't think I understand art." I like both reactions.



OS: How did you come to this project and what are your plans for its future?

DGC: The idea of the project, to place a sequence of images of water surface in every single room of a house, came up in 2002. I tested it at the time in a small house in Poole (UK). From the beginning I was thinking of the complete space as much as of the work inside it. When I started discussing the project with the owner of SALTS and the possibilities for our show, he was excited about the concept and supported and pushed it all the way through. In a way, this house is the perfect scenario for the presentation of the work: the size of the house, the fact that the exhibition space is inside the house and can be treated equal to all other rooms, and its location in mountainous Switzerland. Outside the house is a freestanding double garage, which is used as an extension of SALTS. So we could use this space as an introduction to the project. We didn't want anything else inside

the house besides the water photographs. One garage was left empty with the letter to the tenants placed in the middle on the floor. The second garage was closed off by a brick wall, where we installed a large index giving exact details about each single photograph: where and when it was taken, where it is placed inside the house, in which direction it is pointing now and so on. When you read the letter, look at the index and turn towards the exhibition space, you are facing the complete house, four floors, as one image. We are now in the final phase of a publication, a kind of manual for the show, with a separate reader. One form of its future will be this document. At the same time I will be patiently waiting to find another moment and location to continue this project. I would like to see it happening in different places, with different waters.

- Olga Stefan