

Passage Fotobibliothek

IN A STATE OF FLUX

Photo Flaws in the Course of Time

Ever since the invention of the medium, photographic flaws have been the express enemy of every photographer. At the same time, however, they have always provided a source of artistic creativity and reflection. *In a State of Flux* charts the ever-changing path of such developing flaws, from the accidental to the artistically strategic, and also presents digital examples of so-called Glitch Art.

By imitating reality as closely as possible, photographic images were meant to show precisely what was there at the moment the camera was triggered. Yet the path towards perfecting this medium was strewn with chance occurrences and accidents, mishaps and malfunctions -- in short: flaws. Material phenomena such as a grainy structure in the silver gelatine or stains left by developer fluid were inscribed visibly into the surface of the image, distorting the actual motif. Photographic journals and handbooks responded to this by analysing such deviations with great precision and discussing them with their readership.

Although the pursuit of photographic perfection has, of course, continued to this day, the approach to its "flaws" has changed. Even by the late nineteenth century, the potential had already been recognised by self-appointed "spirit photographers" who began exploiting such flaws to deceive the gullible or to entertain the masses. By way of carefully orchestrated light reflexes or chemical reactions, images were manipulated to suggest that both the spirits of the dead and the thoughts of the living could appear.

It was not until considerably later that there was any serious exploration of the properties of photographic chemicals. The aim was to master the flaws in order to cultivate them and use them for such purposes as advertising. As a result, commercial artists were the ones who gradually brought about a change in attitude. However, this did not mean that what had previously been deemed a flaw was now admitted to the canon of art. The road to recognition was not smooth, and involved much debate. At first, it was primarily the artists of the 1920s and 1930s who could undertake their "unorthodox" experiments freely and unhindered within the context of surrealism. But official recognition did not really come until the conceptual artists of the 1960s systematically explored the possibilities of material visualisation in the field of photography, and began creating artworks that went against the grain of the classic canon following the doctrine of representation.

With the advent of digital photography and its image-processing methods, the "picture-perfect" photograph was only one click away. Yet, even with that, means and ways could still be found to entice imperfection from the realms of the digital – whether through apps and filters or within the framework of Glitch Art. These

developments, at the latest, were to make the photographic flaw acceptable at last.

Curated by Franziska Kunze, Fellow of the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung at Fotomuseum Winterthur

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The book has lost its place as the most important means of communicating information. Since 1993, the World Wide Web has gradually taken over this role. This shift is also of huge significance for the photobook: it no longer needs to fulfil its original purpose of distributing printed reproductions of images in a bound form. In today's constant battle for attention, photographic images are no longer reliant on the medium of the printed book.

In this new context, the unique character of the photobook is increasingly coming into focus. The fluid transitions from album to book, book to object and library copy to collector's item characterise the complex system that books containing photographic images find themselves in today. The framework for the various interpretations of the photobook is established by the area of tension between its definition as a printed duplication and an artistic means of expression.

The Fotobibliothek is dedicated to the book in its physical format, and serves as a bibliographical documentation centre of the Fotomuseum Winterthur and the Fotostiftung Schweiz. In a series of exhibitions in the Passage, it examines its collection and poses questions pertaining to the photobook.