

Memory Pool:

Found photography as material for a contextual practice

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This article aims to investigate the use of vernacular and found photography as an essential part of one of my photographic series. Starting from an artistic process based on the context, that is, based more on the *stimuli* of the place rather than on a predetermined idea, it is interesting to know how a particular place – among many others – challenges the eye and becomes the object of a photograph or a series of photographs. It is also interesting to investigate what are the status of the found photographs, between past and present, as displaced objects within the framework of another representation.

Memory Pool (2016) is a photographic series that, based on a contextual practice and the use of found photography, deals with the memory of a city in Latvia, Daugavpils, and its transformations after the end of the Soviet regime. The images show an abandoned outdoor swimming pool, within which doors, windows and personal objects can be seen submerged. The images also show the result of a gesture: photographs and postcards spread inside the swimming pool.

This work was produced as part of an artistic residency. The specificity of working in residence is often related to presenting new works created on site. The attitude of working on the move (abroad, in an unknown city), and in context (without a predetermined idea) naturally favors the direct experience of the place and puts the artist in a modified state of mind. It favors the creative condition as mentioned by Vilém Flusser in his essay *Exil und Kreativität* (Exile and creativity, 1983). It is precisely in this condition that there is room for discoveries. Working in displacement and in context also favors the emergence of new forms, often open, that go beyond traditional narratives and incorporate characteristics of imprecision, uncertainty and imbalance.

Images of a time

Situated in the Latgale region, southeast of Latvia, close to the borders with Lithuania, Belarus and Russia, Daugavpils is the second largest city in the country. That unusual scene, with objects from the domestic space displaced to the swimming pool and relegated to the action of the weather and the time for many years, seems to materialize an image – as a mental representation – of a historical period that the country seeks to leave behind, lost in time.

Found photography

Unlike the doors and windows, which were already there, the images seen at the bottom of the swimming pool were inserted during the production of the artwork. These are family photos and postcards of landscapes from the region, acquired at the city's flea market. Found by chance, these images were then separated into groups, like boards that could be organized by content.

By using this type of image, the artwork is part of a photographic tradition based on found photography, a genre of practice that involves the recovery and eventual exhibition of lost or abandoned photos, often of unknown authorship. The action of appropriating and displacing the photographs allows us to recover these images from oblivion, as well as promoting visibility, recognition and discussion about them. The use of these abandoned images also

collaborates as a reflection on what is disposable and what should be preserved as historical or affective memory.

By bringing external elements into the swimming pool, the artwork is therefore constructed through observation and gesture. Through the observation because it starts from a gaze that identifies, in a public space, a scene of lyrical nature. And through the gesture because it produces an intervention that completes it, also in the sense of expression.

A surface for the appearance of images

The swimming pool of *Memory Pool* then becomes a kind of opening to the city's memory while also opening up to discovery, allowing the connection between the past and the present. In a way, it evokes some paradigmatic models of the 20th century in terms of archival and image manifestations that think history and knowledge from the perspective of the multiplicity of possible relationships between objects from different spaces and times.

An essential reference in this sense is, naturally, the thought introduced by the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). The *Atlas Mnemosine* paves the way for an archeology of visual knowledge and offers today methodological aspects of great interest for historiography and artistic practices, as well as for media and information studies. Georges Didi-Huberman, in several of his researches and exhibitions, work on the form of the atlas in the context of the historical knowledge through images. He conceives the form of the atlas as a relational device that deals with information, with the archive, establishing connections, analyzing differences and similarities, in short, producing knowledge. Like the *Atlas Mnemosine*, the famous *Le Musée imaginaire (The Imaginary Museum)* by André Malraux is one of the most important manifestations that works on the archive and image in the 20th century. *The Imaginary Museum* has the practical and technical capacity to provide the meeting, in the same place, of objects that are distanced in space and time. The dialectical use of images, that is, images in dialogue with other images, has become one of the attitudes that marked 20th century art. We can identify a strong expression of this practice in the *Atlas* of the German painter Gerhard Richter. His *Atlas* is an ongoing project, consisting of a collection of photographs, clipped newspapers and sketches that the artist has been collecting since the 1960s.

All these references and procedures for comparing images and objects evoked here constitute not only methods of organizing their specific elements, but also serve as models to construct knowledge. Through the multiplicity of their forms and the connections produced, they help us think the current era and certain contemporary artistic practices. A fundamental difference in relation to these models, whose organization of images is often of striking importance, is the fact that the swimming pool of *Memory Pool* presents images in a most precarious way.

Unlike an efficient organizational model, capable of providing a clear understanding of the facts, this photographic series expresses itself as doubt, questioning the real ability of the individual to grasp the context in question. Reaffirmed by the title, the series recognizes this swimming pool as a place of contingency, which holds together countless personal and collective memories that can be interconnected and potentially reactivated both from the remains of domestic spaces relegated to disuse and from the images of people who inhabited them, printed in equally abandoned photographs.

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