

6th Helsinki Photomedia Conference

Theme: Contact of Models

Artistic Research Practices

Monika Junker PhD

Keywords:

Construction of Models through Photography. Changing Models. Fluid memories.

Structural change, Transformation processes.

Essayistic photo film. Storytelling by encounters with city residents.

Abstract: Changing Models

Research Objectives:

How does one capture through photography a place that no longer exists? A place unfamiliar to me, yet alive in the stories of its former inhabitants?

The place:

During an artist-in-residency (KODEKÜ) in Weißwasser, a small town in Upper Lusatia (Oberlausitz), Saxony, Germany, near the Polish border, in August 2023, I met locals who shared tales of a bygone era, now preserved only in memory.

The history:

In encounters with locals I was told about a part of the city that was built very rapidly during its industrial rise, in what was then East Germany. The city was shaped by glass manufacturing and coal mining. Economic restructuring after German Unification (1990) made people lose their jobs when factories closed. Many people looked for new jobs in other places and moved away. Weisswasser-Süd, once a vibrant residential area with new housing, schools, and kindergartens, saw its population dwindle. As people moved out, homes were left vacant, and, eventually, the urban area was diminished, its buildings dismantled, transforming once residential zones into fields and a forest.



remembrance in white, 2023. Stills from the photo film, realised during the artist-in-residency Kodekü at the city of Weißwasser. 10 min.

Today the city is going through another phase of transformation, this time due to the coal industry's decline. These changes pose a considerable challenge, but also an opportunity for citizens to take part in shaping a vision for their future. The aim is to motivate them to socially participate in the ongoing democratic processes.

Memory and identity:

I think about the construction of identity through the act of retelling personal memories. Memories that evolve over time, influenced by our perspectives on the past and present circumstances. How fluid is our identity as we adapt to the reconstruction narratives of our own history? How can I visually represent these shifting models through the retelling of my own memories of this place, influenced by the stories of those I've encountered?



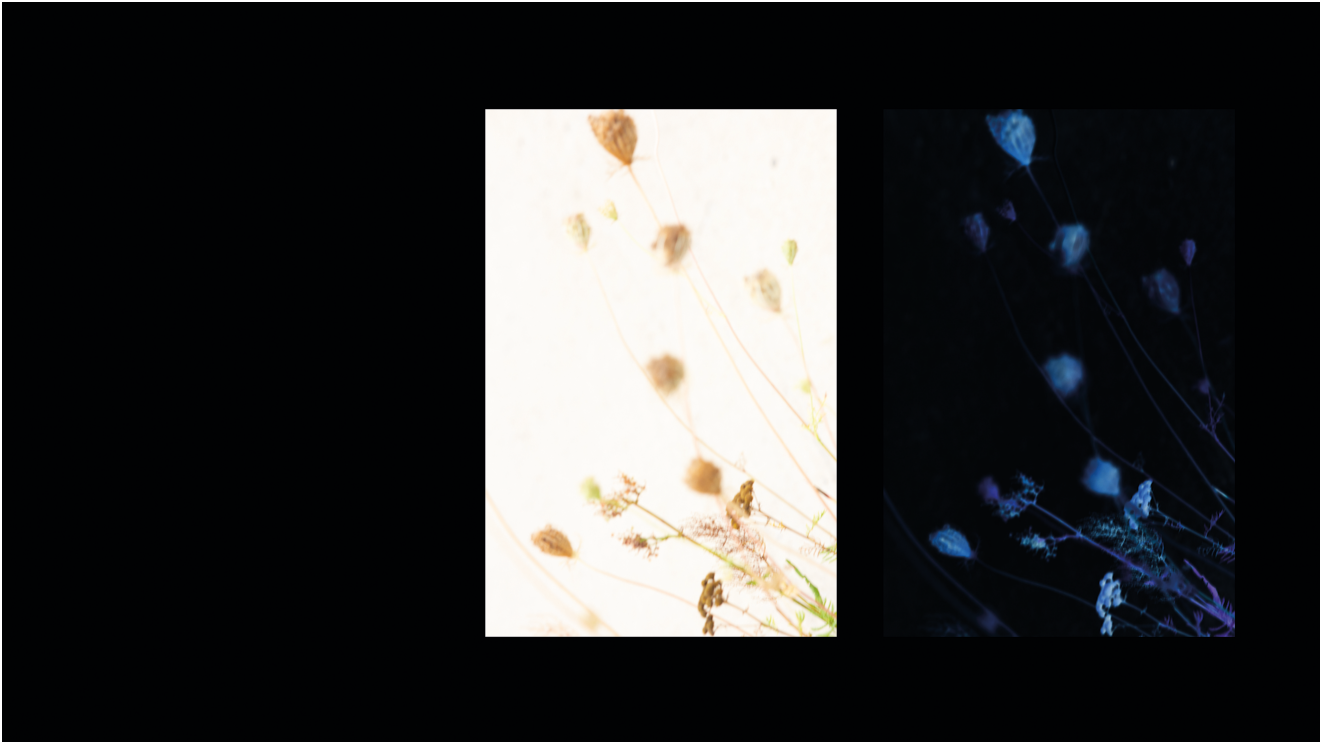
remembrance in white, 2023. Stills from the photo film, realised during the artist-in-residency Kodekü at the city of Weißwasser. 10 min.

My methodology:

- Research: interviews, encounters and exchanges with the people of Weißwasser-Süd.
- Image research in the local library's archive.
- Sensory walks in the fields of Weißwasser-Süd.

My findings:

- **Sense of the place.** The encounters with locals helped me to gain insights into *the sense of the place* of Weißwasser-Süd.
- **Fluid memories.** It helped me to 'gather' various subjective memories and to explore how fluid memories can be when narrating a place through the lens of others' floating memories.
- **Changing Models.** My aim was to visualise how memories, viewed from our current perspective reconstruct themselves in relation to our present situation. This is why I juxtapose documentary photography of today's place with abstract photography in the montage of the photo film that was realised during my stay in Weißwasser-Süd, which is creating a certain sense of distance and irritation. This contrast aims to underscore how fluid our memories can be and how our models may change alongside our memories and constructed identities.



remembrance in white, 2023. Stills from the photo film, realised during the artist-in-residency Kodekü at the city of Weißwasser. 10 min.

My presentation:

One focus of my presentation is on the artistic practices I employed during my artist-in-residency in Weißwasser-Süd. At the same time I aim to describe the artistic process underlying my approach and the storytelling through encounters with local residents.

A second focus is on the idea of reconstructing an image of the past that persists in people's memories. I seek to merge the idea of constructing reality through photography with that of constructing memories based on stories I heard from a third party.

My presentation is divided into two parts. In the first 10 minutes I intend to shed light on my artistic processes. In the second part I present the photo film and open up an exchange on the findings from my artistic research.