

Marta Djourina

Between Media. The Dematerialization of the Everyday

Text: Babette Marie Werner

Marta Djourina's works deal with the medium of analogue photography in the broadest sense of the word and explore its possibilities. Images produced by direct exposure, pinhole camera explorations, three-dimensional, folded photographs that are almost sculptures, performative works, so-called "blind light-paintings" and "filtergrams," as Djourina calls them, represent the broad spectrum of her work. An art student at Berlin's University of the Arts since 2012, Djourina primarily uses the medium of photography to explore how light can be used as a pictorial medium. She does not focus on the reality in front of the camera, but on the reality inside it – down to the almost microscopic analysis of matter. Her experiments, which are usually performed without a camera, always follow a special experimental protocol: Sometimes the image is produced by the play of light and shadow that occurs between the light source and the lens in the enlarger; sometimes folded photographic paper is exposed using different light sources, so that the light and dark breaks and lines in the paper – caused by the folding – generate a type of pictorial narrative. The pictures contain traces of previous actions, and these traces are the result of interactions between light and paper. The works, which are often created over a longer period of time, are frequently given a performative character through the artist's various interventions. In the series *Lichtspiel* (Light Play, 2015), the artist documented the play of light at various intervals throughout a single day, as the light poured through the blinds of a window. She took the resulting negatives and printed them on transparent paper before folding the prints associatively along the traces of light – just as she found them on the paper. In the series *Von: Mir / An: Mich* (From: Me / To: Me, 2015), Djourina sent homemade, working pinhole cameras on a three-day postal journey. The cameras doc-

umented their travel experiences along the way: As the cameras were transported from door-to-door, the photographic paper that had been inserted captured vibrations and changing light situations. Resembling paintings, the photographs that Djourina developed in the lab don't have any conventional postcard motifs, but poetically depict their own travel experiences.

In the first decades of its existence, photography was chiefly idealized as a representational process superior to the classical means of visual representation, such as copper engraving, drawing, painting, and sculpture. However, its claim to being considered a fine art was denied up to the 1960s, when classical Modernism was finally called into question. On the one hand, photography was seen to have a clear advantage when it comes to depicting reality, because it apparently produced more detailed and more objective pictures, since the photo did not emerge manually, the way it did before, but mechanically. On the other hand, due to the negative-positive method, it was technologically easy to reproduce large quantities of images. In addition, ever since photographer Eadweard Muybridge took his exact photos, that is, when, in 1878, he took a series of snapshots of human and animal movements that led to the groundbreaking insight that motion had been represented inaccurately for centuries, photography was no longer merely regarded as a medium for reproduction, but also as a credible research tool. With the rise of digital photography, though, this medium has increasingly come under fire as being less and less credible, since digital photography is more and more frequently used for manipulative purposes in scientific and documentary contexts. Society's deep-rooted belief in the objectivity and authenticity of photography has long since become shaky.

In many of Djourina's works, the camera doesn't exert any influence. Instead, the artist does not allow

her works to be reproduced as serial prints; and, as such, she turns the statement that defines photography as a medium of reproduction into an absurdity. Due to the intense desire for images that characterizes contemporary consumer society, Djourina's photographs are difficult to access from the very start, because she negates a component that is constitutive of this medium: its reproduction. Instead, the artist (who, in addition to analogue photography, also does drawings) assigns an important role to chance as it exerts its effects on photography, which as a genre is defined by total technological control. The artist's subjective eye does not give way to the camera's objective gaze, but vice versa: Reduced to their essentials, the technological components of light, photographic paper and enlarger become part of the artistic creative process, as do various objects, such as common everyday items. Djourina, though, explicitly withdraws from this process here and there. It is the paper and light sources themselves that become agents in this process.

One of the results of these artistic experiments (all of them unique) is the series *Die Entmaterialisierung des Alltags* (The Dematerialization of Everyday Life, 2015). Made in an analogue photo lab, these "filtergrams," as the artist calls them, reveal various aspects of Djourina's work coming together: In this series, she works with everyday objects such as plastic bags and Tupperware. Because of their transparency, the items serve as filters for the artist and are stored as props in her studio. Instead of negatives, she gradually places several of these transparent objects in the enlarger. The result is a reversal of colors, as well as a kind of "dematerialization" of the otherwise three-dimensional objects. The plastic bags or Tupperware can no longer be recognized as such in the new image; their materiality seems to have been extinguished. As is the case in photograms, the real distance between the photographic paper and the object is what indirectly causes the individual item to touch the photographic paper. Only the light touches the object. During the experiments, the heat emitted by the light source in the enlarger often causes the objects to lose their shape

and even to melt. After the exposure process, the everyday objects no longer exist in their original form. Djourina's "filtergrams" are the only remaining evidence of their existence: images of seemingly banal everyday items, which the artist elevates to aesthetic objects.