

"As more and more architecture is finally unmasked as the mere organization of flow—shopping centers, airports—it is evident that circulation is what makes or breaks public architecture...." — Rem Koolhaas, architect's statement for the MoMA expansion project ('Studies in Modern Art 7: Imagining the Future of the Museum of Modern Art', The Charette: Excerpts from the Architects' submission. Edited by John Elderfield, Beatrice Kernan and Barbara Ross, MoMA, New York, 1998)

IMG_ is a serial work. Produced as installments over time, it is the visual analogy of its musical counterpart, like a row of tones relating to chromatic scale. The simile's extend to computer processing as the sequential transmission of all the bits of a byte over one wire.

IMG_ displays all the characteristics of abstract photography by focusing on closeness, shape, form, colour, pattern and texture – we are unable to see the whole object, and therefore we can only understand it by what is implied. But this isolation of parts gets us closer to the essence of the object to create a memory attachment, or some emotional response to the image. We aren't supposed to know the subject or its structure, emotional expression reigns over observed reality. The tight focus and 'out-of-focus' attributes add to its conceptual import.

This work of Johan Nieuwenhuize has been shot in western world cities - Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, New York, Washington, Oslo, Copenhagen, Toronto, London, and Glasgow, where some of the more recent images were captured. Regardless of where they were taken, they exemplify the mono-cultural attributes of modernist architecture and of globalism. For him the structures that drew him to the detail have a generative character, they are similar regardless of city, or rather they are all of the one place - the distances between evaporate through the possibilities of fast and 'cheap' travel. They are not records of the specific places, more a feeling, a different kind of indexical record which unlock a flow of associations.

Some serendipity has played its part here in the Glasgow elements of *IMG_* which filter through recent time to December 2007, when Stroom Den Haag organised a visit to Glasgow from 10 representatives of artist run initiatives in The Hague. As a result of that connection, I was invited by Stroom in 2008 to undertake 2 days of studio visits in the city, one of whom was Nieuwenhuize. These curatorial visits are intended to open up their artists to curatorial curiosity and to extend their networks. All cultural dialogue between people of different nationalities is based upon mutual encounter.

Nieuwenhuize lives and works in The Hague, a city with a robust infrastructure for the visual arts, from the artists' initiative 1646, to the municipal Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. Central to the support of emerging artists and the city's art scene is Stroom, an institute for art and architecture, which has a documentation centre on approximately 900 artists living and working in The Hague. Publications, exhibitions, and international exchange are all part of that richness.

Young artists are particularly resourceful, and publications and the photo-book are particularly valued as a way of crossing boundaries and getting their work 'out there'. Nieuwenhuize is the initiator and curator of Platform57, which organises exhibitions, education programmes, workshops and tours in the borough of Escamp, with a particular focus on activities for young people.

This use of contemporary art, temporary site-specific installations, large-scale participatory photography projects (such as Inside Out by JR) and the talents of artists, to subsequently bring out the creativity of others, is an important facet of social engagement.

When he came to Glasgow for a site visit in late 2013 he booked into accommodation that happened to be the house of the wife of the late architect Isi Metzstein, whose contribution to modernist churches and public building in and around Glasgow is notable. He met with the artist Toby Paterson - who is working on a publication with Platform57 in collaboration with Stroom and The Modern Institute - whose fascination with Brutalist architecture is shared by Nieuwenhuize. This is apparent in the identifiable industrially produced materials – which could be metal, concrete, plastic, glass, and Perspex - which expose themselves in the details of *IMG_*.

Apart from modernism, he is obliquely inspired by modern and contemporary art and painting (Mark Rothko, Gerhard Richter, Anish Kapoor and James Turrell). This of course in the 'aura' of their work, or the object as art, but street and documentary photography continues to be an inspiration for him, and in particular questions over the veracity of the image as a representation or record of reality or an event fascinates him. So much so that he uses the same tools as documentary photographers and the same techniques used by reportage photographers to process the images. The 4:5 ratio of the images in *IMG_* is based upon that of the large format camera's American photographers use for their urban landscapes. Dutch portrait photographers like Celine van Balen, Rineke Dijkstra and Koos Breukel who work with this format also, are an influence on Nieuwenhuize's work.

The format implies an amount of concentration and time on behalf of the 'subject'. In *IMG_* he uses this format mainly through a compact digital camera to grab small and insignificant subjects when they present themselves, but in turn asks the viewer to take their time when absorbing. It's fast (digital), but refers to slowness (analogue) and attention to detail. *IMG_* also alludes to an important feature of documentary photography in the production of an archive (of some value and historical significance) and its distribution through publication. The exhibition form too is a particularly useful locus for the generation of ideas around the 'object'.

'Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known... [they] are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed... [they] establish and administer the cultural meanings of art'. ('Thinking About Exhibitions' edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne. Routledge, 1996.)

The history of documentary is largely that of photographic communication, whereas as 'art' it hones in on photography as objects, *reified for their aesthetic qualities*. The distinction between fine art photography on the one hand and representational photography on the other, between objective reality and the subjective expression of the artist, is not a polarized debate anymore.

Artists today are less trenchant in their positions and in their approach to photographic media (chemical or digital, still or time-based). Traditional forums for magazine published photography have been declining for the past 40 years and many documentary photographers sit comfortably within the gallery as a way of contextualising their work – over the same duration conceptual ideas and critical practices merged, clashed, and transformed one another, forming a place for photography in the art world. Photographic media are now ubiquitous within gallery systems and the internationalism of contemporary art, though there are still frictions around the 'value' of the photograph as art, an issue which is more about taste and connoisseurship.

'... The notion of techno-cultural revolution has been widely accepted and celebrated by cultural critics and practitioners, and such ready acceptance has tended to inhibit critical

engagement with post-photography. Indeed, it has encouraged a great faith in the new digital technologies, based on the expectation that they can empower their user and consumers. A great deal of what passes for commentary or analysis amounts to little more than a simple and unthinking progressivism, unswerving in its belief that the future is always superior to the past, and firm in its conviction that this superior future is a spontaneous consequence of technological development ... The idea of a [technological] revolution in this context serves to intensify contrasts between past (bad) and future (good), and thereby to obscure the nature and significance of very real continuities"

Kevin Robins, 'Will Images Move us Still', in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, edited by Martin Lister, Routledge 1995.

In the mid-80s, the advent of digital electronic technologies had a destabilising affect on the status of photography. In the early 1990s the debate on the demise of photography intensified – the photograph as the result of a chemical and optimal process, and as a trace of the real was in question. This indexical quality to the real was considered obsolete, photography was 'old', the digital was 'new', one was the past of photographic time, and the other was of the future. Of course the death of photography was overrated, and the birth of post-photography whilst useful and which remains enduring, was premature.

Nieuwenhuize's work is uncomplicated yet is imbued with the wider associations of the mediums condition, a symptom of that regeneration of interest in the histories and practices of photography today.

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