MARIO PFEIFER
2008–2018

AGAIN / NOCH EINMAL
(2018)

In April 2016, four men beat and dragged a young man out of a supermarket in Arnsdorf in eastern Germany. He was tied to a tree until the police arrived. Hot-tempered, with a bottle in his hand, he had been insisting just before that the phone card he had purchased was defective. The events inside the supermarket were filmed by someone else in the store. The video went viral. Many blamed the victim, agreeing that the four men were only protecting the supermarket and its clients. In May 2017, the trial was dismissed. However, the victim was not able to testify in court; a week before the verdict his body had been found in the woods in central Saxony.

Driven to ask questions ignored by the media and the court, Mario Pfeifer reexamines the incident through Again / Noch einmal (2018), gathering a jury of German citizens to review these events. Mediated by actors Mark Waschke and Dennenesch Zoudé, Again / Noch einmal raises questions of moral courage and vigilante justice, asking: How can we maintain a dialogue as society drifts apart? How does the construction of certain narratives influence our perception of reality?

—Thiago de Paula Souza / Berlin Biennale

Again / Noch einmal
2018

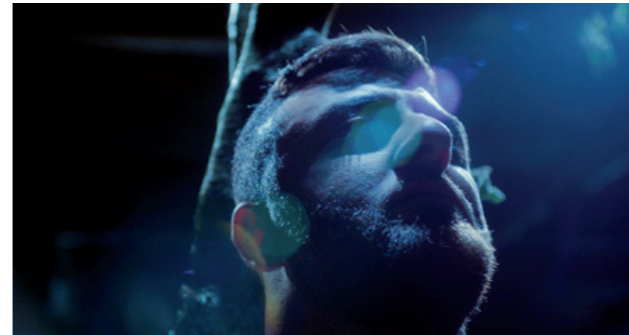Hig Definition Video installation, color, 5.1 surround sound, 42 min

Exhibition views 10. Berlin Biennale, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2018

Again / Noch einmal
2018

Hig Definition Video installation, color, 5.1 surround sound, 42 min

Video Stills

Mario Pfeifer

Again / Noch einmal
2018

Hig Definition Video installation, color, 5.1 surround sound, 42 min

POINT OF NO RETURN
(2017)

Point of No Return is a synonym for former slave ports along the Atlantic coast, where thousands of slaves were sent to the Americas, without hope to ever return. The former slave traders' island in Badagry near the border of Benin carries this name. The video reconsiders the island as well as the megapolis of Lagos today: A seemingly ideal fishermen colony at the former slave trader's island as well as a vast growing city – marked between micro economy, colonial hegemony, liberal exploitation and massive corruption – appear on screen.

The images are framed with conversations from some of the last remaining direct descendants of returnees from Brazil. Portrayed in their homes, which had been built after Brazilian designs, members of the families Martins, Augusto and Lawson talk about their ancestors' return, the celebration and later the decay of Brazilian culture in Lagos during the past decades. Each protagonist tells their personal story to urban and economic aspects that altered the Brazilian Quarter's architectural, social and political pattern through the modernization of Lagos, in which economical, social and religious impacts led to the decay of this cultural heritage.

Point of No Return documents some of the last premises of the community, its memories and the physical manifestations of the Brazilian Quarter. Drone footage depicts the massive growth of the urban environment, and how it threatens the quarter. Imagery produced in the National Library of Lagos looks at different publications such as the culture magazine "Nigeria" from the 1950s, when the Brazilian Architecture of Lagos blossomed, and the results of the English and Portuguese colonial economies were celebrated.
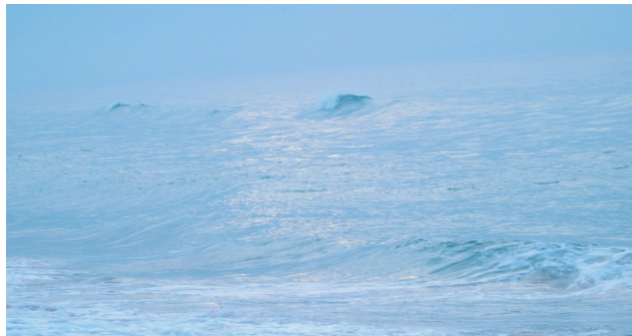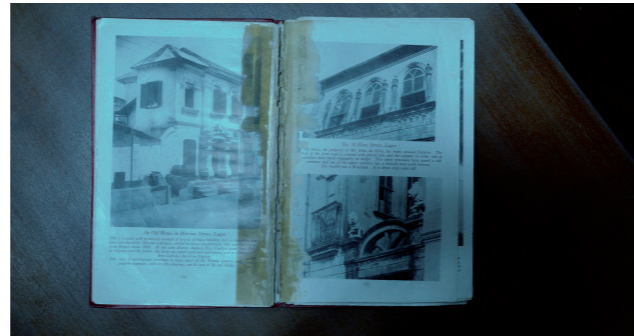
Mario Pfeifer

Point of No Return
2017

4K Video, color, stereo, 30 min
Produced by Aderemi Adegbite

Nigeria / Germany

Mario Pfeifer

Point of No Return
2017

4K Video, color, stereo, 30 min
Produced by Aderemi Adegbite

Nigeria / Germany

In between each chapter of the two-channel-video installation a music video connects those historical debates with the present condition. *Point of No Return* is also the title for General Pype's – a legendary dancehall musician in Nigeria – latest song that addresses the history of slave migration in the 17th century from Africa's west coast to the Americas. The imagery depicts the Brazilian Quarter as well as the former slave traders' island Badagry. Pype's lyrics call for an end of contemporary slavery and connects protest movements from the USA and Brazil to those currently taking place in Nigeria. The music video's visuals depict Pype as somebody symbolically imprisoned, freeing himself through his speech, his artistic expression.

Dancehall has been described as a hotspot of cultural, economic and political struggle, and is a synonym for the cultural exchange from the Americas to the West coast of Africa. Dancehall was once founded as a musical counterculture against the elites in Jamaica, and spread globally.
General Pype in collaboration with visual artist Mario Pfeifer follow this trait with Point of No Return, emphasizing the political message through a music video production.

The combination of both a essayistic approach through image production and the production of a music video, *Point of No Return* aims to speak to a larger audiences across generations.
A cultural heritage can only be protected, discussed and analyzed if following generations share knowledge and interest. Thus *Point of No Return* addresses the dynamics of knowledge production, preservation and distribution crossing genres, formats and styles to lighten up a debate on migrating culture and the threat of capitalism to minority cultures.

Dancehall ist mehr als die bloße Antwort auf hegemoniale Macht, sie reproduziert und vermittelt ebenso Machtverhältnisse. Die Dancehall-Kultur ist das, was Pierre Bordieu als ein "Feld kultureller Produktion" bezeichnet. Als solches ist sie ein Raum, in dem die symbolischen Unterscheidungsmerkmale geschaffen, aufgelöst und verstärkt werden, die die Machtverhältnisse in einer gesellschaftlichen Hierarchie aufrechterhalten. Da die Dancehall-Kultur eine der primären Ausdrucksformen darstellt, mittels derer die schwarze Unterschicht Gegenideologien, Gegenidentitäten und eine subversive Praxis konstruiert hat, liegt Ihr ein transformierendes, antihegemoniales Potential zugrunde.

(N. C. Stolzoff, Die Politik der Dancehall-Kultur, Der Black Atlantik, HKW, 2004)

ON FEAR AND EDUCATION, DISENCHANTMENT AND JUSTICE, PROTEST AND DISUNION IN SAXONY / GERMANY* (2016–)

*ÜBER ANGST UND BILDUNG, ENTTÄUSCHUNG UND GERECHTIGKEIT, PROTEST UND SPALTUNG IN SACHSEN / DEUTSCHLAND

It's all not so simple, unfortunately. Right-wing, centrist, left-wing populism, the post-factual era, disunited and manipulated societies—it feels like an apocalyptic downward spiral, but apocalyptic moods are unhelpful. Disunion is unhelpful. The fact is: What agitates some today fills others with serenity and courage. Where emerging forms of government trigger some people's flight instincts, others believe they are represented at long last. Where elaborate critique runs out of oxygen, un-heard voices swell to a new volume. But it may well be that in the end everyone will feel like they have been taken for a ride. A sharp swing to the right? Leftist resistance? The rationality of the cen-ter? Caught up in old political schemata and systems of belief, people across the mental spectrums ignite lines of conflict within the public spirit that awaken demons of antagonism.

Mario Pfeifer chose a different path. He conducted interviews with nine people, giving them the room to speak. Each is asked the same questions, each is allotted the same media space and time. The speakers remain anonymous, their functions unspecified, but the viewer quickly gathers: most of them are from Saxony, they helped found Pegida, they are a trade unionist or the mayor of a small town, a concerned businessman or a critic of Islam, a psychoanalyst or a conflict researcher. All of them earnest people who share their understandable thoughts on German society today with the camera, telling stories of their disenchantments and insights, their involvements and their hopes for society. No agitation, no populism, and instead people who speak intently and calmly.

What to make of what they say? You won't know until you listen. Reasoned political opinion—not always easy to come by—is a genuine attainment of focused attention. To watch means to follow the speaker's thoughts and think for yourself. For nine hours, face to face. No Like buttons, no Twit-ter shortcuts for arguments that take time, no rapidly tuning in and out again as you zap through (un)congenial worldviews and opinion templates. Mario Pfeifer constructs a democratic space out of the time of unabridged speech and the succession of perspectives that, in this instance, defy alignment with a simple polar antagonism. His film is a contribution to political education and the search for consensus in the face of intensifying speechlessness and isolation, at a time of increas-ingly brutal contentions over reality and more and more irrational dialogues.

Pfeifer's project would seem to draw conclusions from the observation that the aspirations to greater solidarity behind leftist politics and artistic critique are manifestly losing traction and at worst even fuel rather than check processes of social disunion. Because leftists and artists tend to ignore, or fail to take seriously, what is going on beyond the islands on which their lives are lived and their beliefs widely shared? Because they champion openness and plurality of opinion but never spell out what that would mean? Because we have lost sight of the fact that a polity must listen to itself in order to work through the full extent of its internal differences and understand its potential fracture lines?

"On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and Disunion in Saxony / Germany" was commissioned by Kirsa Geiser for Mario Pfeifer's solo exhibition at the GALERIE FÜR ZEITGEN-ÖSSISCHE KUNST Leipzig, which closes on January 8. Pfeifer's film will be on view indefinitely at KOW. The complete material may also be found on the projet's WEBSITE [www.aboutnow.info]

– Alexander Koch
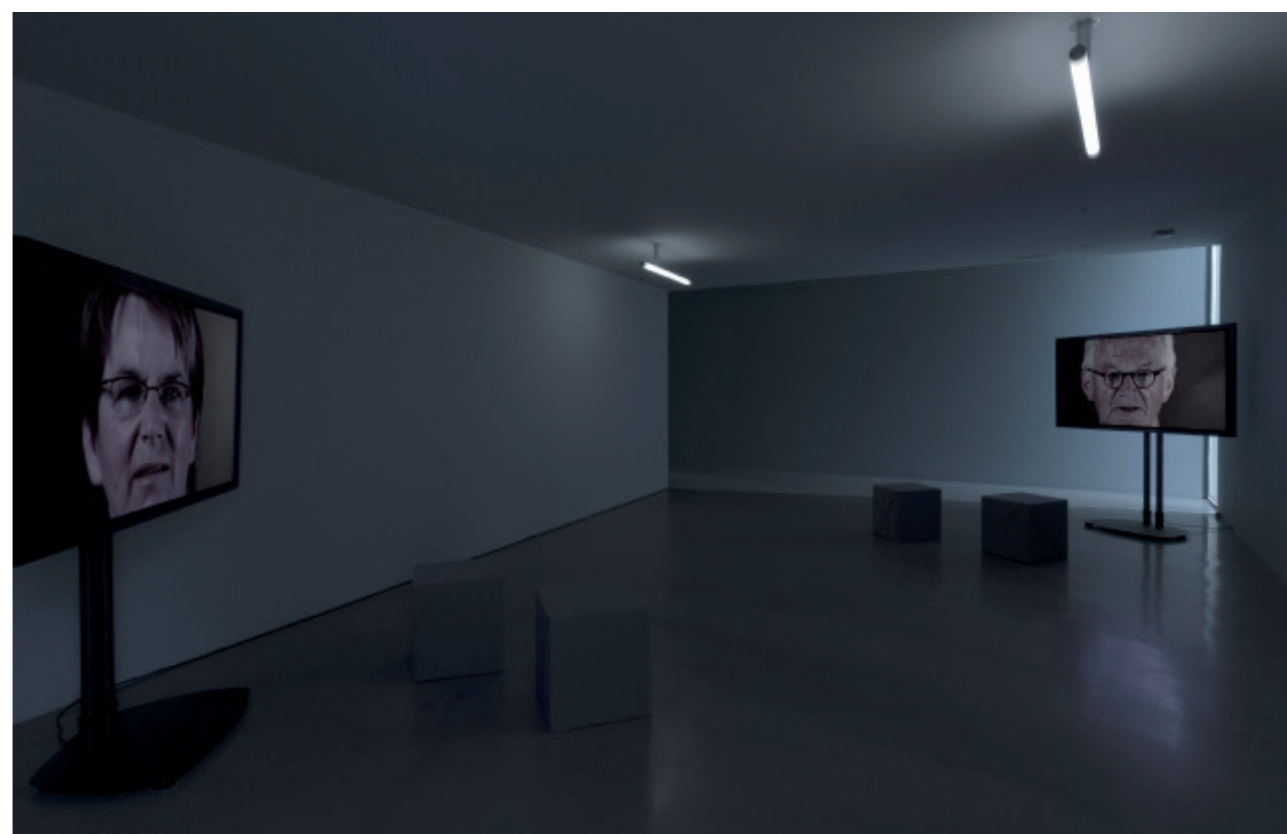
Mario Pfeifer

On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and Disun-ion in Saxony / Germany
4K video, 546 min, 2016–

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Mario Pfeifer

On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and
Disunion in Saxony / Germany
4K video, 546 min, 2016–

Exhibition view KOW, Berlin, 2017

Mario Pfeifer

On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and
Disunion in Saxony / Germany
4K video, 546 min, 2016–

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Video stills, 2016

CORPO FECHADO
(2016)

Corpo Fechado is a recently produced 4K Video Installation in São Paulo, Brazil focussing on societal conditions in relation to spiritual and religious practices in the megapolis.

Constructed in three episodes and three interludes the video introduces the practices of :

Christavao Chrystal – a healer who treats with extraterrestrial forces that have never incarnated on Earth, curing societal diseases such as depression, anxiety, etc with the goal to help people to develop themselves as better human beings in order to improve a global situation to live together in a more sustainable and caring way. The energy he usesto heal originate from five entities living 195 billion light years away, in a parallel galaxy. The video animation documents the energy travel by using up-to-date scientific and mathematical patterns to illustrate what "science" knows today about the universe and our galaxy.

Tata Katuvengeci, a leader in the afro-religion Candomblé in the tradition of the Congo-Angola Bantu culture who combines socio-political and religious practices in a Terreiro in the outskirts of São Paulo addressing issues of racism, oppression, and institutional neglect. He practices an accumulation process to re-install the purest forms of Candomblé which originated from West-African Nations during the slave trade over the Atlantic in the 16th century.

Makumba Cyber is a post-religious manifest written by Xarlô that addresses our contemporaneity through a digitalized, immaterial representation - from the the state of nature to a new state under the white flag of peace. Makumba Cyber originates in the tropical rainforest and departing to the Latin American Memorial in São Paulo through a journey of social and political crisis to which the manifesto invokes a new way of human engagement to save the planets's prosperity.

The episodes are interconnected through interludes that introduces sites of production of religious objects. Here chain and hand-produced objects are manufactured and distributed globally for believers of all major religions, on the junction of labour, market and faith.

Corpo Fechado is a video installation situated between documentary and fiction, between reality and belief, between social realism and philosophical prediction in the age of media and tradition.

Each Episode was produced in collaboration with the practitioner – both to represent core ideas of the practice and ideology but also as a critical reflection on the societal condition we live in through the lens of faith. Each Episode ends with the URL under which the practitioner can be reached, grounding a viewer that the seen and heard has a body to consult with, what is been shown on screen is mere a reality than fiction.

Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

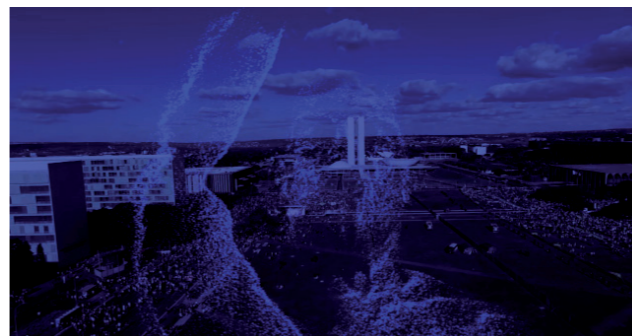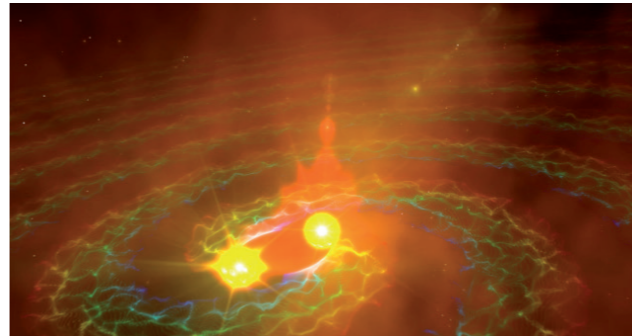4K Video installation, color, surround sound, 47 min

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

4K Video installation, color, surround sound, 47 min

Video stills

#BLACKTIVIST
 (2015)

Three Afro-American rappers pose as jihadists in front of a flag evocative of the IS. They're shooting a be-heading, a bound hostage knees before the camera: Barack Obama. It fades to videos of bombs exploding in a desert. Should Obama be made to atone for his drone wars in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen? Or, as other video excerpts suggest, should he be held accountable for the fates of Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin and every black US citizen murdered by police brutality that he, as the first black president of the USA, was somehow unable to prevent? The rap-jihadists get started with the machete and…

It's no wonder that the music video Blacktivist by the Brooklyn rap group Flatbush ZOMBiES, uploaded on the 11th of September 2015, became an internet sensation. The play count is over 2.6 million by now. It's optimized for shock value. Social critique, violence, stylish outfits, jazz infused rap and references to the history of black activism in the USA all come together in the video.

But Blacktivist isn't only a music video, it's also one of the three parts in Mario Pfeifer's two-canal video installation #blacktivist (2015). For the first time in Europe, it will be on view at ACUD in Berlin. A (white) German artist collaborating with a New York rap group to produce a music video that meets the standards of the best clickbait but also functions as part of the artist's work – it just hasn't been done before.

Pfeifer unfolds the Blacktivist video in his installation and supplements it with two more layers. On one layer: interviews with the rappers from Flatbush ZOMBiES where they distance themselves from filthy rich rap moguls (It should not make you comfortable that you made a billion dollars this year off of fucking music and endorsements, but you don't give nothing to the neighbourhood). On the other: documentary footage showing how you can print your own handgun with freely available files from the Wiki Weapon Project. No background check required. All you need is access to a 3D-mill.

 Diverse contemporary American discourses collide in the installation – from social justice and racism to weapon legislation and the war on terror – producing a misleading impression of cacophony. At least it seems like the audio channels of the parallel videos have been composed to subtly fade into each other at points so that the shrill metallic noises of the milling machine (on the right) doesn't interrupt the rap track (left) at all but rather doubles as its percussion. Coincidence or by design? The question stays open, much like the question of whether #blacktivist can be understood as a commentary on the artform of rap itself.

Either way, you could feel reminded that rap – like DJing, B-Boying and Graffiti, one of the four pillars of Hip-Hop culture – was originally a pacifying artform. It developed in the Seventies as the bloody gang wars in the Bronx, fought with pistols and knives, were coming to an end. From then on, they fought with rhymes, words were the weapons. That the rappers who sung about guns and murder would go on to become the most successful, seems at once logical and paradoxical, but also that there was always the "conscious" who in turn criticised this. How do the Flatbush ZOMBiES position themselves in relation to the spiral of violence? You'd have to watch #blacktivist to the end...

– Jan Kedves

Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist
2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min
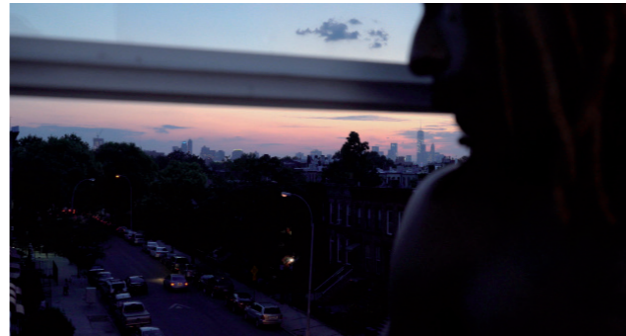
Video still
Exhibition view Ludlow38, New York

Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist
2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Exhibition view Ludlow38, New York
Exhibition view Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist
2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Video stills

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Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist
2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Video stills

Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist
2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Making of / production stills
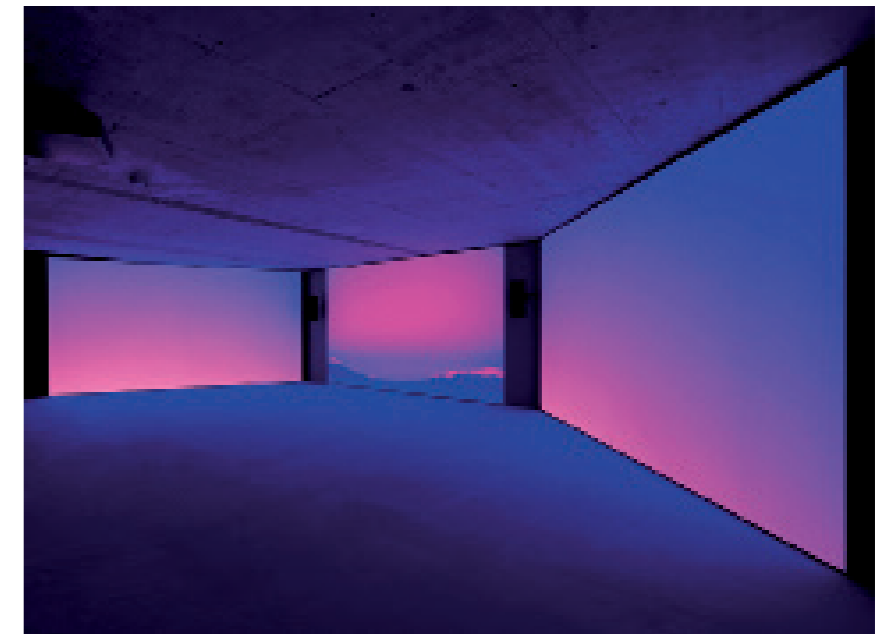
APPROXIMATION
IN THE DIGITAL AGE
TO A HUMANITY
CONDEMNED TO
DISAPPEAR
(2015)

Techno music plays at the far end of the earth. Squid gyrate to a strobe light, the crab industry runs like clockwork, and real men earn their peers' respect when their fish traps are full. The sunrise is as breathtaking in Patagonia as it is in the Panoramabar in Berlin's Berghain nightclub. Using luscious colors, rousing rhythms, and meticulously paced cuts and transitions, Mario Pfeifer's "Approximation", a three-channel video installation, caters to contemporary aesthetic preferences with brilliant images shot using high-resolution 4K technology. The footage was captured at the outer margin of the inhabited earth, a place where people sometimes fall over the edge and disappear. This time it is Tierra del Fuego's natives who may or may not still exist. Pfeifer captured them on camera – or did he? What the three projections in KOW's basement gallery show is not a documentary, but a way of seeing. The exhibition presents a new perspective on one of the planet's most ancient and remote indigenous people: the Yaghan, who are in the process of dying out.

Formerly aquatic nomads, the Yaghan first settled the southernmost tip of South America thousands of years ago; most of them now live in Villa Ukika, a housing project set up by the military near Puerto Williams on the island of Shunuko in 1954. Not much is left of their culture. Decades ago, the Chilean government brought them churches, schools, wage labor, and an ethnological museum to make sure they understood how they would henceforth live their lives. Scores of international teams of anthropologists have been visiting to take final photographs of the remaining Yaghan, record their voices, and take DNA samples. They trace the image of a culture that has held still for the cameras as long it has been frozen in time. And the Yaghan play along. They make a livelihood of being holdovers from the past. The present? Development? No, nothing. Defying this rearview-mirror mentality in Cape Horn's backyard, Mario Pfeifer has painted the portrait of an indigenous community in the here and now: it is disappearing not on the periphery but in the very center of the world, where global colonialism and capitalism swallow it up.

Pfeifer worked on site for four months, adopting a participant observer's perspective to film the indigenous people as they live today. In stupendous and sometimes hypnotizing images, he has created an aesthetic model that runs counter to the conventional templates of anthropological and documentary representation. Pfeifer's exploration – in the language of mathematics, to "approximate" is to forego exact solutions in favor of useful results – is an anti-representational project that blows ancient dust off the Yaghan's shoulders. "Approximation" yields episodic cross-sections of their living conditions today, accompanied by a techno soundtrack that smooths their transition into audiovisual immateriality. The fish cannery and the nightclub, everyday life and nature: everything is uploaded into the global culture industry's data streams, where it must seem as strange to international audiences as to the natives themselves. Pfeifer transposes local culture into a new register, releasing it from the antiquated hardened image of a community disfigured by its submission at the hands of modern civilization, and lending it a contemporary face.

Pfeifer showed the members of the world's southernmost people digital copies of photographs of their forebears taken by the German missionary and anthropologist Martin Gusinde around 1920; pictures they had never seen on an electronic device before. The video shows them swiping and zooming through the images on an iPad, identifying relatives and reconstructing lineages that dissolve in the soundtrack's rhythms. The New York-based musician Kamran Sadeghi also used the Yaghan's elegiac dirges, which Gusinde recorded in 1923 for his digital compositions. Pfeifer's "Approximation" is based on research and collaborations with various partners in Chile, Germany, and the United States. A book documenting the project will be published by Sternberg Press in 2015. An editioned album of Sadeghi's music will be released during the exhibition's opening. Approximation will be presented concurrently in the German Competition section at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.
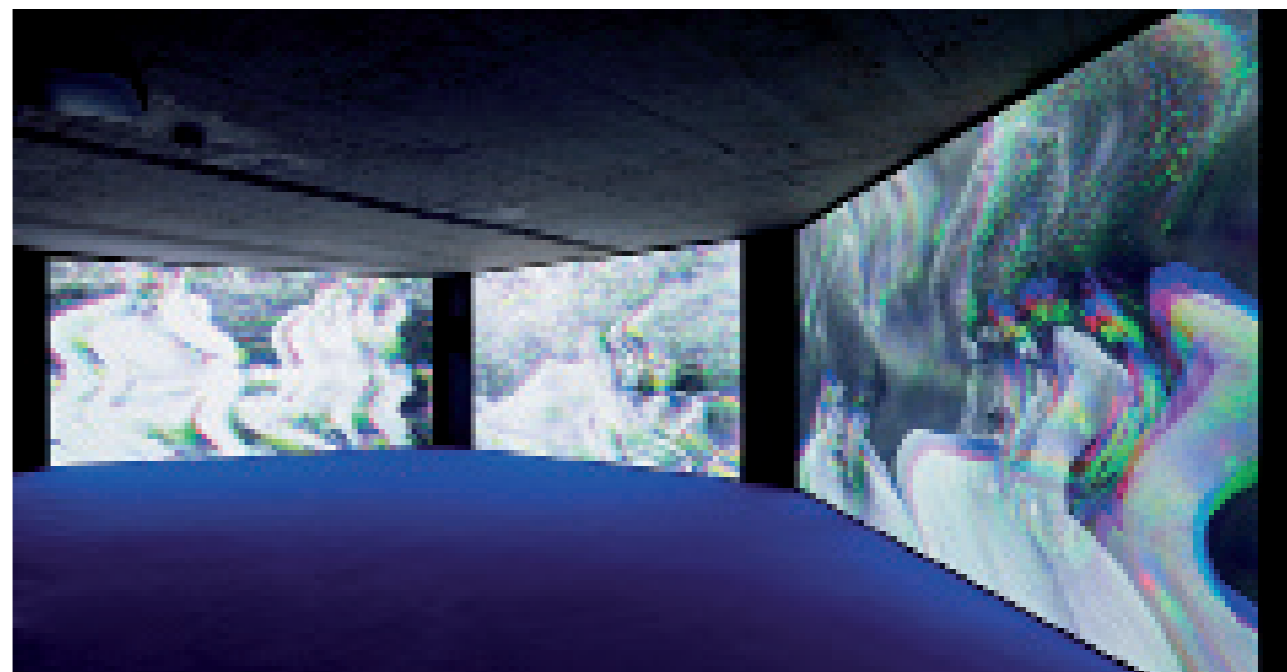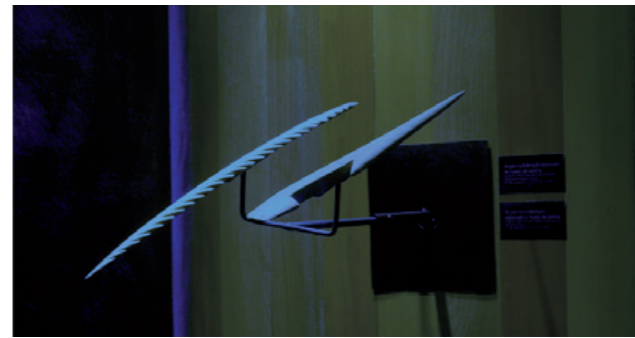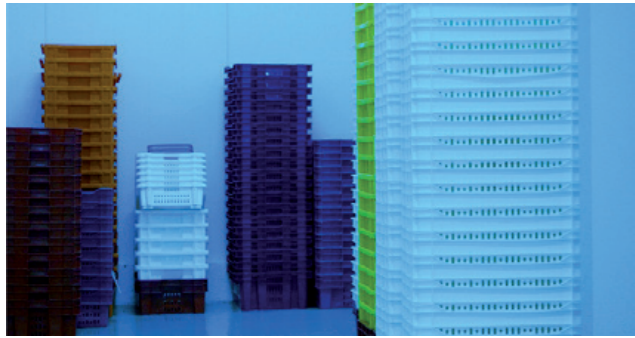

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age to a humanity condemned to disappear, 2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation, color, surround sound, 26 min

Exhibition views KOW, Berlin, 2015

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age
to a humanity condemned to disappear,
2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation,
color, surround sound, 26 min

Exhibition view, Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2015
Exhibition view, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age to a
humanity condemned to disappear,
2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation,
color, surround sound, 26 min

Video stills

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age to a
humanity condemned to disappear,
2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation,
color, surround sound, 26 min

Video stills

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age to a
humanity condemned to disappear,
2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation,
color, surround sound, 26 min

Exhibition views KOW, Berlin, 2015

Mario Pfeifer

Approximation - LP Vinyl Edition

Musical score written and produced
by Kamran Sadeghi, commissioned by
Mario Pfeifer for the multichannel vid-
eo installation Approximation in the
digital age for a humanity condemned
to disappear.
Artwork by Markus Weisbeck, photo-
graphs and video stills by Mario Pfeifer.

CONVERSATION PIECE
[WESTERN SAHARA]
(2012-2018)

After completing his film project on Mumbai, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue (2010–11), a fifty-two-minute, nine-episode video installation complemented by a substantial volume of the same title (2013), Mario Pfeifer began, in 2012, to conduct research on the Western Sahara, which has been occupied by Morocco since 1975. Now, after extensive research and three visits to the region, as well as to Bilbao (see below), the idea for a film installation has emerged. This will be tied in methodologically speaking with the Mumbai project and will be realized in 2014.

Pfeifer's way into the region came via an encounter with a family belonging to the Sahrawi nomadic tribe, whom he made repeated trips to visit. Their daily lives and family history became the essence of a documentary portrait, which over the course of time revealed various political, social, and cultural aspects of the Western Saharan occupation. As with the Mumbai project, Pfeifer's method involves a phenomenological approach based on participative observation. Without a script, without looking for a particular narrative, and with no film equipment (he shoots with an iPhone 5), he followed the daily routines of the family and sat in on their conversations, allowing the subject matter and situations to arise of their own accord, instead of actively constructing them, and gradually broadening the scope of his documentary approach.

The first body of recordings was made while Pfeifer was living 200 km from Dakhla out in the desert with the family, whose income mainly derives from camel breeding. Pfeifer films certain moments of the day—morning prayer, the organization of work tasks, evening entertainments— from a discreet distance, sticking closely to the phenomena of the material world: their chromatic atmospheres, their sensual surfaces, their acoustic manifestations. He develops qualities of content by focusing his cinematographic eye on the visible and the audible. From the very beginning he aestheticizes what is seen, and there can be no doubt about his interest in the image. Here he measures his documentary approach not against the yardstick of authenticity or informational content but the impressiveness and dignity of his subjects as he perceives them.

Viewed from this perspective, the family story gradually unfolds: two young men help their grandfather, a tribal leader, with the camel farming. One of them is also captain of the Spanish Western Saharan football team. Since emigrating to Spain, he has played in the FC Barcelona youth side. The other followed him and moved to Bilbao. He grew up in the Tindouf refugee camp in Algeria. Ten thousand tribespeople from the Western Sahara fled there after 1976 (during the Western Sahara War of 1975 to 1991) to escape the Moroccan army of occupation and French military interventions. One of the sons now works there for the Algerian government as an education and sports official. He cannot return to his family in the occupied area.

Mario Pfeifer pursues these stories in his follow-up research and in his ongoing production. He meets the protagonists in the environments they live in and films the tales they have to tell. He also conducts interviews, which focus in particular on the economic situation in the region, and will find their way indirectly, or indeed directly, into the film. The end product will be a multi-part video installation, which draws on the same methodology as the Mumbai project and further develops the spatial fanning out of the filmic narrative and atmospheres. Pfeifer will return to the region in the spring of 2017 to do further work on the project.

The plan is to complete the installation at the end of the year. It will also include photographic studies of urban development in the occupied territories, making a documentary comparison of this development with the architecture of the refugee camp. As with his previous projects, Pfeifer's filmic work will be accompanied by a bilingual publication reflecting on the methodology and content of his cinematic practice.

During Pfeifer's last visit to the Western Sahara, he also took photographs of the things that the camel breeders prize. One picture shows a very colourful (and beautiful) water canister covered with pelt, fabric, and netting. These objects are heavily individualized and have been owned and cherished by their owners for many years. This is especially true of the family tent, whose interior has been patched over the years with a variety of strikingly patterned materials. Much to the delight of the family, Pfeifer traded the old interior, which is now in his possession, for a "refurbishment" of the tent's interior with new fabric. In the coming months he will work with this material, which is visually very appealing and heavily coded in cultural terms, and it is conceivable that it will go on to play a role in either the film, the installation, or the publication.
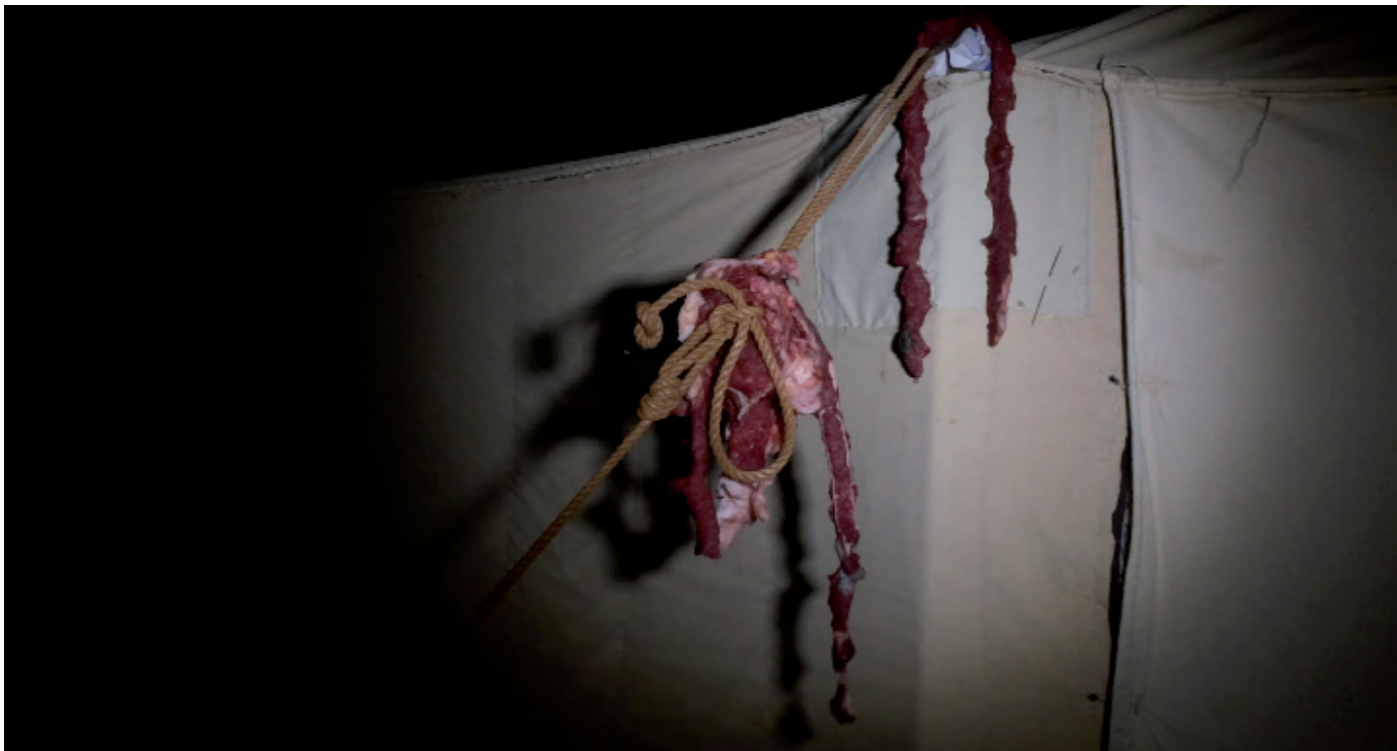
[Text: Alexander Koch]

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece [WesternSahara], 2012-2014
Unitled [Occupied Territories], Inkjet Print, 2015

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece
[Western Sahara], 2012-2015
Video stills

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece [WesternSahara], 2012-2015
Untitled Object [Belt], Color Inkjet Print, 2014

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece
[Western Sahara], 2012-2015
Video stills

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece
[Western Sahara], 2012-2015
Video stills

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece [WesternSahara], 2012-2015
Unitled [Refugee Camps, Algeria], Inkjet Print, 2014

Mario Pfeifer, Conversation Piece [WesternSahara], 2012-2015
Unitled [Occupied Territories], Inkjet Print, 2014

Exhibition view, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2010

A FORMAL FILM
IN NINE EPISODES,
PROLOGUE & EPILOGUE
(2010)

When he came to Mumbai, India, in 2010, Mario Pfeifer faced a problem that had already vexed Pier Paolo Pasolini and Louis Malle, who traveled to India in 1968, and many cinematic auteurs after them: What to show of a country and a culture that still strike the Western filmmaker as mostly unfamiliar and exotic? How would they avoid a colonialist perspective replete with standards of value they have brought with them? How might they catch a glimpse of what lies beyond the stereotypes about social inequality, about the misery of lower-caste life and the upwardly mobile middle classes, that dominate the critical picture of India in the minds of Westerners? Louis Malle thought it was impossible. In his classic „L'Inde Fantôme", he spends 378 minutes commenting on the limitations of his own view.

It is this problem that Mario Pfeifer's 35 mm production „A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue" addresses. We show the work as a multipart installation on three floors. Pfeifer uses lay actors to stage various perspectives on everyday life in Mumbai. Held together by a loose narrative, the open sequence of episodes arranges local sceneries as though in a kaleidoscope: a cab ride, fishermen on a river, a visit to a temple, workers in an ice factory. Pfeifer seeks out places that offer themselves as symptomatic sites to a social critique, talks to the citizens, researches backgrounds. He reenacts situations based on real situations and then shoots them a single time. Yet his gaze through the camera finally gives a surprising phenomenological twist to such methods of documentarism and realism: its attachment is solely to what is visible. Instead of looking for a filmic representation that seeks to do justice to the social world he finds, he gleans atmospheric details. And instead of offering a penetrating critique of what he sees, he focuses entirely on formal aspects: on colors and the qualities of materials, on stretches of time and sequences of motion, on sounds.
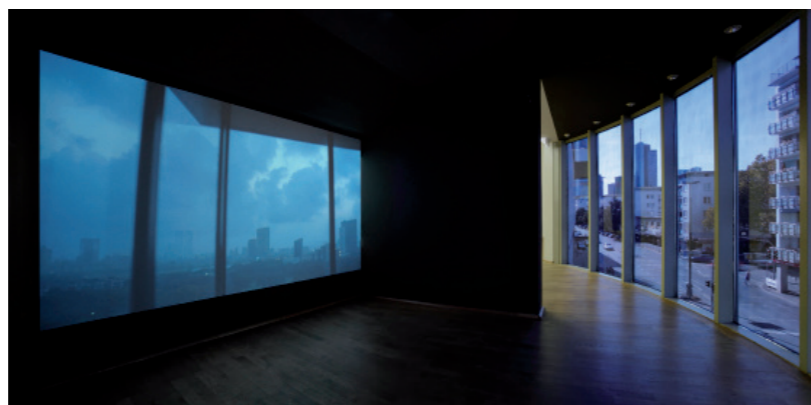
Pfeifer knows that there is no escaping the Western conditioning that informs his eye—but that does not stop him from seeing. So he formalizes what is happening and captures the inherent dynamism of the cinematographic apparatus in filmic tableaux he distributes across an exhibition architecture built for this purpose. Its rigorous and mannerist formal calculation suggests a kinship between his images and the paintings Gustave Caillebotte created around 1875, works that Jeff Wall also drew on. And not unlike Wall, Pfeifer not only does not align what can be seen of social landscapes, what can be shown of them, and what can be known about them—he does not even offer his audiences a coherent perspective of interpretation. Looking at what are allegedly social hot spots of a "developing country,"

„A Formal Film" arrives at motifs of a disturbing beauty that defy easy consumption, either as exotica or as critical clichés. Mumbai remains, for the time being, the phenomenon that it already was for Louis Malle. Yet unlike Malle, Pfeifer distances himself from documentarism, casting even the posture of commentary and critical information in doubt: documentary social critique itself appears as a form of colonialist encroachment.

– Alexander Koch

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

Exhibition view, MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main,
2012

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

Exhibition view, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2010

Credit Line

A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue &
Epilogue
2010

35 mm film & HD-multiple-channel-projection
for exhibition space, colour, stereo, 50 min

Hindi, Tamil with English subtitles

Cast: Gopal, Nandani
Director of Photography: Avijit Mukul Kishore
Assistant Director / Research Assistant: Sujata
Venkateswaran
Sound Operator: Suresh Rajamani
Casting: Mario Pfeifer, Sujata Venkateswaran,
Parul Wadhwa
Production /Location Manager: Dhiraj Singh
Production Assistant: Parul Wadhwa
Supported by Kodak Mumbai
Produced by [blackboardfilms]
Conceived by Mario Pfeifer

© 2010 India / Germany

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010
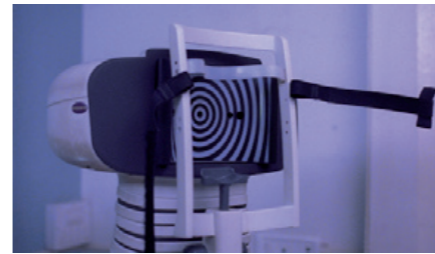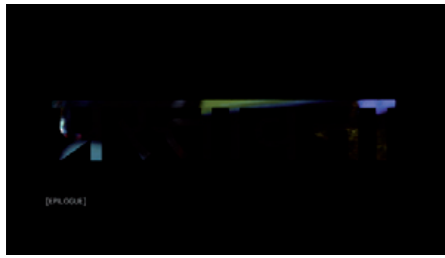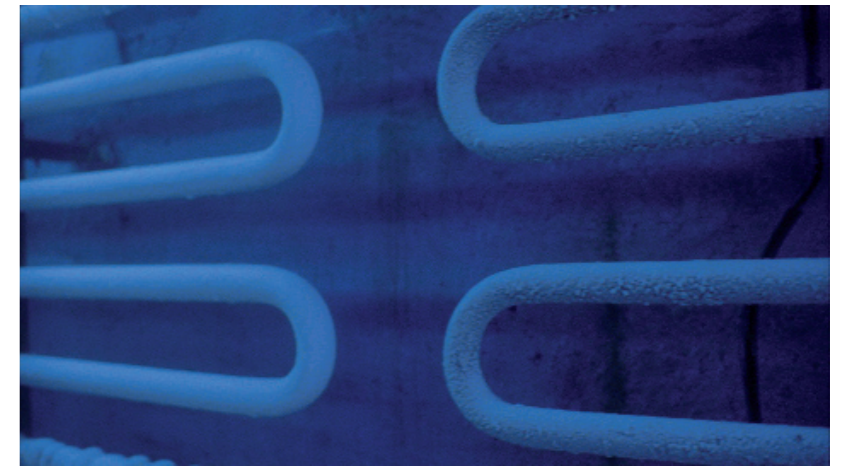
Production stills

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

प्रकरण ४

[EPISODE 4]

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

60

प्रकरण २
[EPISODE 2]

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

प्रकरण ७
[EPISODE 7]

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

Mario Pfeifer, A Formal Film in Nine Episodes,
Prologue & Epilogue, 2010

35 mm film, colour, stereo, 50 min

THE LOS ANGELES
RIVER–PROJECT
(2009–2010)

"The Los Angeles River–Project" explores-in the format of a feature length film-the complex political discussion of the river's status and the environmental and social impact of being corralled into a flood control system over seventy years ago. The conflict is manifested by the river's unclear and unresolved definition. (...)

This film is an investigation into the urban land-scape, and develops along this frontier of the socialized wilderness, taking into account tech-nology and planning, the command of nature and its demarcation with the urban, as reflected through the stateless person who inhabits this denaturalized and destroyed environment. Despite these extremes the two protagonists with very different backgrounds and reference systems, meet at the riverbank; whilst the scientist Brent takes water samples and monitors the river's local wildlife, he encounters the homeless Marvin and begins to investigate his survival strategy.

Mario Pfeifer, The Los Angeles River-Project
2009-2010

Text by Mario Pfeifer

35 mm film & HD projection, colour, Dolby SR 5.1,
80 min
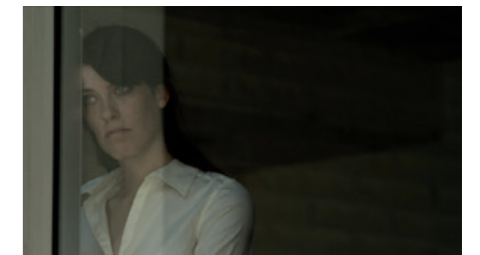
Mario Pfeifer, The Los Angeles River-Project
2009-2010

35 mm film & HD projection, colour, Dolby SR 5.1,
80 min

RECONSIDERING "THE
NEW INDUSTRIAL PARKS
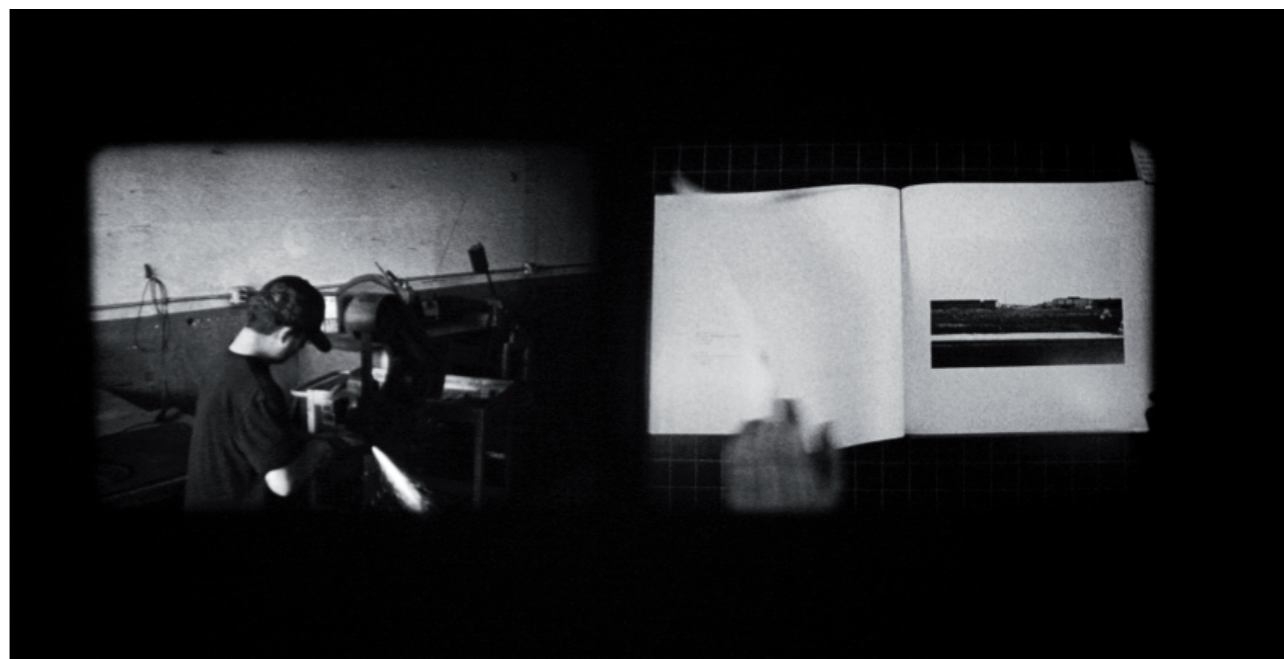NEAR IRVINE, CALIFORNIA"
BY LEWIS BALTZ, 1974
2009

"Reconsidering The New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974" revisits one of the industrial structures Lewis Baltz documented in his historic "New Topographics" from the outside and depicts the interior setting of a metal workshop with an eleven minute tracking shot. During this time, the 1974 book version has been reconsidered from back to front, each turning page a montage within the continuous 16 mm black and white footage. An interview with J.R. Billington, a company owner in this building for nineteen years, discusses the socio-economical situation in military manufacturing in Orange County in the 1980's and today.

Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974, 2009

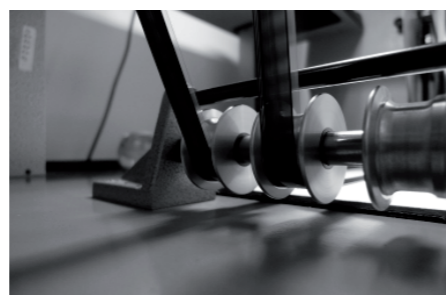Text by Mario Pfeifer

Production stills

Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974, 2009

Dual 16 mm film installation, B/W, mono, 13 min

(…) In "Reconsidering", there is only one shot, an unedited piece of film, which unfolds before our eyes. There is no director's input, which might condense proceedings, but there is rather a clearly understandable structure, which operates along spatial vectors. And yet here too, the things glimpsed by the camera's proxy are a result of numerous considerations with regard to the totality of the pictorial framing, the movement of the camera, its standpoint. The constant tempo of the camera's movement is in step with the constant rhythm of the act of leafing through the book, which doesn't dwell on each page for the same length of time. Above all, the images of that building that the factory owner Billington is talking about remain visible for longer, as though they would illustrate his narrative. All of these aspects place the technical character of film as a medium in a relationship to the real world and construct a new, cinematic image. Viewed retrospectively, each decision involved in this process turns out to be intentional.

This liberation of the pictorial material from its aesthetic straightjacket posits a new interpretation, in which the focus upon the industrial buildings of the 1970s owes far less to town planning and ultimately social implications than to purely formal criteria. Pfeifer creates a subtext, which equips the familiar images with new insight and productively permeates what we have already seen at a decisive point. In so doing, we are dealing with no less than the question about what the photographic and cinematographic image wants to deliver and how we perceive the very thing that wants to be known as "reality". The production of image presents itself as an aesthetic process, which—and this is decisive—doesn't relate to reality in any congruent way, but operates within the context of its own dispositive, in parallel perhaps, but nevertheless always differently. Precisely because Pfeifer presents an abstract inventory of the building, his eye unveils itself as a thoroughly defamiliarized, alienated entity which is aware of the complexity of our life world and world of work in the era of neo-global liberalism.

This also becomes apparant by the latest when viewing Lews Baltz's photographs in the mirror of Mario Pfeifer's "Reconsidering". The apparently objective portrayal of reality is the most robust critique of its self-assertion. Anybody who, like Baltz, doesn't even try to penetrate the surface of things to arrive at their essence, and who reveals reality as an illusion within the moment of its accurate registration, has long since left the ideological argument about realism behind. Be that as it may, the "reification of human relations" insists here upon an adequate visual expression.
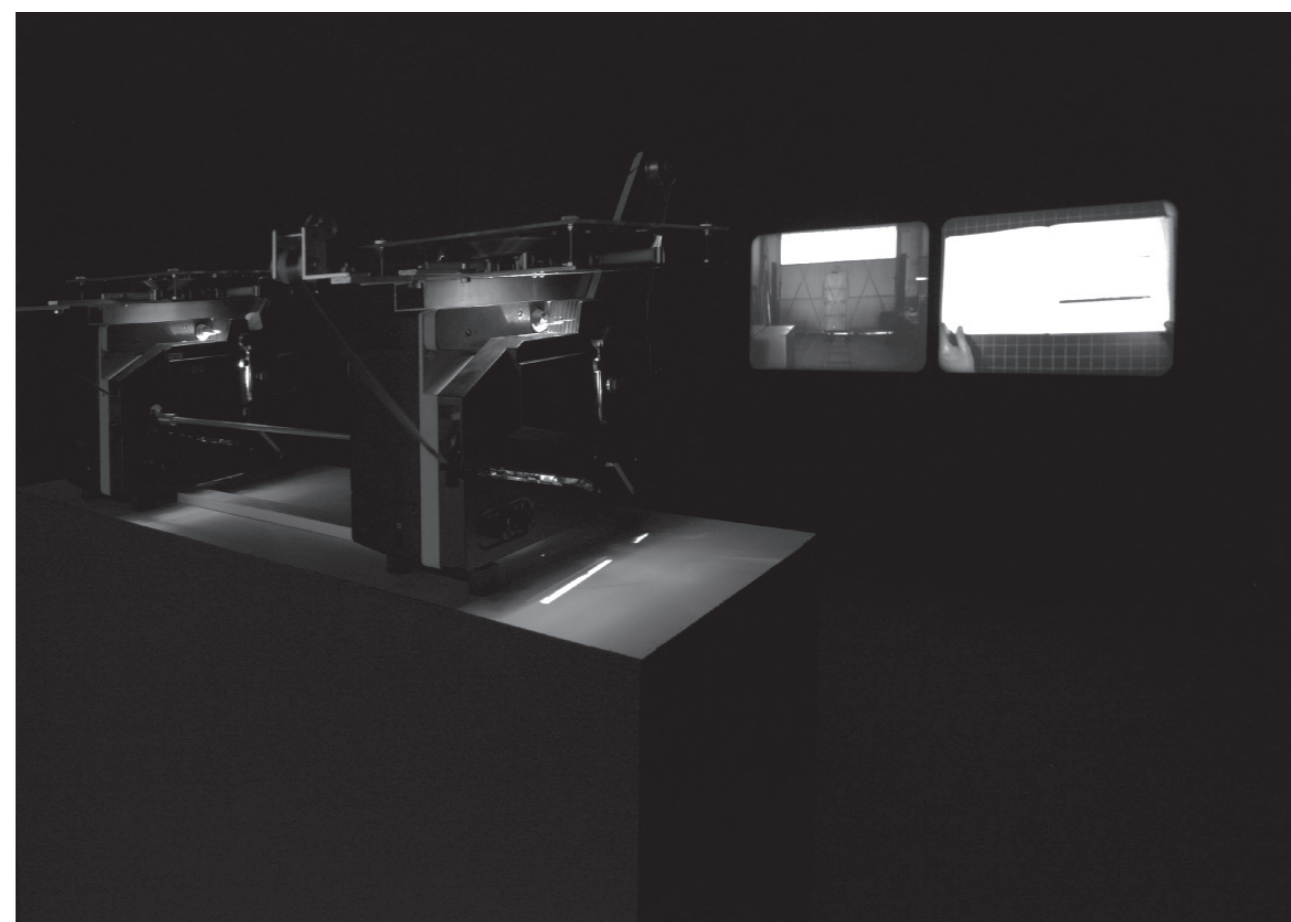

Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974, 2009

Text by Vanessa Joan Müller, in: Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering ….1974, Sternberg Press, 2011

Lewis Baltz, The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California, (a sequential work with 51 elements) 1974, gelatin silver print

Production stills

Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974, 2009

Exhibition view "New Topographics", Landesgalerie Linz, 2010

Credit Line

Reconsidering The New Industrial Parks Near
Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974
2009

Synchronized dual 16 mm film installation with
sound, B/W, 13 min

English

Voice Over: Leigh Ledare
In Conversation: Jim R. Billington
Cinematographer: Norbert Shieh
Sound: Wilson C. Busfield
Grip: Patrick Perez
Title Design: Devin Dailey
Shot on location in Irvine, California and The
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
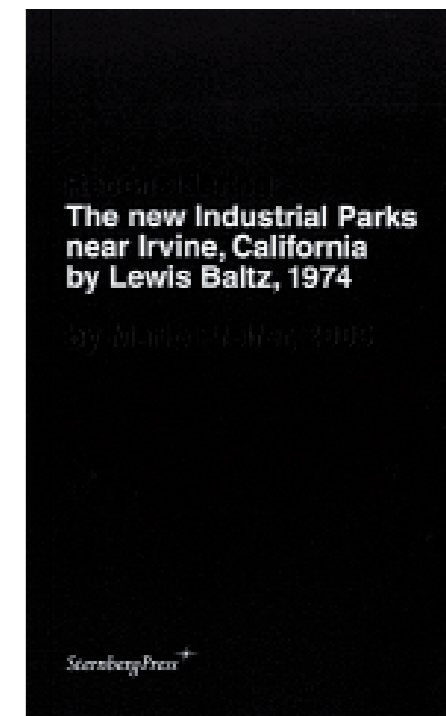Produced by [blackboardfilms]
Conceived by Mario Pfeifer

© 2009 USA / Germany
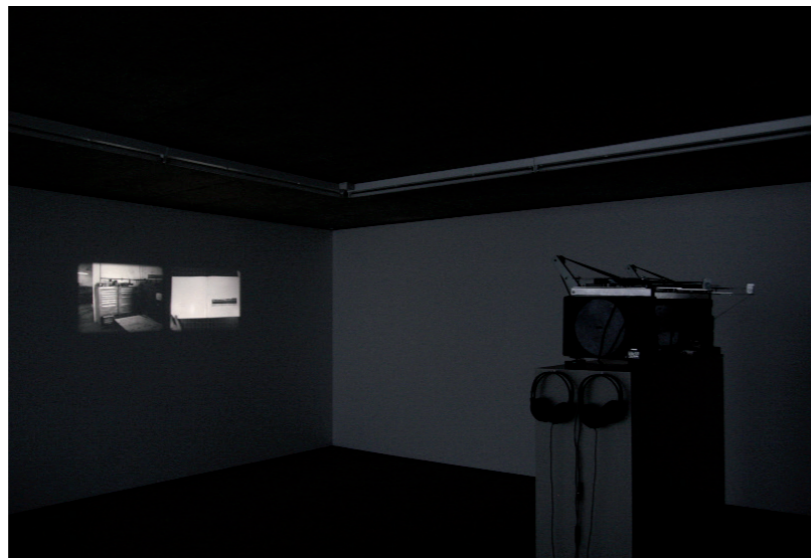
Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial
Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974,
2009

Exhibition view "Antirepresentationalism I. Politics
of Redescription", KOW Berlin, 2009

Exhibition view "New Topographics", Landes-
galerie Linz, 2010

Mario Pfeifer, Reconsidering The new Industrial
Parks near Irvine, California by Lewis Baltz, 1974,
2009

Reconsidering
1611 S. Boyd Street, St. Ana, California, by
Lewis Baltz, 1974 [mirrored], 2011
Archival Inkjet Print on Monoprint Rochester
Plus, 60 x 80 cm, framed in matte silver gray,
Nielsen Classic 33 aluminum profile

Publication with texts by Chris Balashak, Lewis
Baltz, Vanessa John Müller, Mario Pfeifer,
designed by Devin Dailey and Till Gathmann,
Sternberg Press, 2011

YET UNTITLED
["PIECES OF NATURE"]
(2008)

"Yet Untitled ['Pieces of Nature']" (2008) describes both performance and studio film production. Situated in a loose, self-reflexive narrative poised between the traditions of structural film, dance and theater, the carefully-choreographed film follows actors in what appears to be a casting process. Breathing, moving, and literally constructing the film before our eyes, crew members and the director himself are also revealed as actors, literally mirroring a photograph by Jeff Wall's famed photograph "Picture for a woman" (1979).

Mario Pfeifer, Yet Untitled ["Pieces of Nature"]
2008

Text by Amy Patton (excerpt)

Jeff Wall, Picture for Women, 1979, transparency in lightbox, 142.5 x 204.5 cm

HD-projection, 16:9, colour, stereo,
11'30 min

Pfeifer's recourse to the canon of classical genre painting and postmodern dia-positives, his transformation of art historical material into moving images and his psychoanalytically loaded meditation on spectatorship merge into moments of growing distance towards the notion of essence. Niklas Luhmann discusses this tendency as metamedialization, the interlacing of different realities and their perception as symbolic systems. The actor's speculations on their very roles, their relations among each other, their indirect communication with the director and last but of course not least the mirror wall–Pfeifer's delicate web of representational strategies foregrounds exactly this inter-mediality, the symbolic power that jostles our imagination and fosters the wide range of associations immersing in the very process of meaning making. But what cultural consequence is to follow? The ambivalent relation of the as highly as hermetically loaded studio space and its factual surrounding is becoming clear when Pfeifer closes his film with the shot of an actor leaving through the back door of the studio onto a real road. The notion of "the streets" and its oppositional model of agency contrasts intensely with the constructedness of an 'art-icifical' realm of image production. This provocative coda is the powerful critique of Pfeifer's piece. (...) Pfeifer's particular synthesis of the real and the symbolic, the representative and the sensuous ultimately manifest the philosophical depth of the piece without straightening out the paradoxical discomfort of his very medium.

Mario Pfeifer, Yet Untitled ["Pieces of Nature"]
2008

Text by Julia Moritz: A Better Articulation of Something Real. Simulation and Imagination in Mario Pfeifer's Yet Untitled ["Pieces of Nature"] (excerpt)

HD-projection, 16:9, colour, stereo,
11'30 min

Credit Line

Yet Untitled ["Pieces of Nature"]
2008

S-16 mm film transferred to HD, 16:9, colour
Stereo, 11'30 min

English and German with English subtitles

Cast: Evelyne Cannard, Simon Denny, Assaf
Hochman, Andrew Kerton, Anca Rimnic
Munteanu, Mira Partecke, Bastian Trost
Cinematography: Max Penzel
Sound Design: Thomas Wallmann
Montage: Mario Pfeifer/ Amy Patton
Sound Recording: Michael Klöfkorn
Light Design: Patrick Albring
Still Photographer: Eric Bell
Produced by Mario Pfeifer, Amy Patton
[blackboardfilms]
Conceived by Mario Pfeifer

© 2008 Germany

Mario Pfeifer, Yet Untitled ["Pieces of Nature"]
2008

Pieces of Nature, like Flowers in Water (after
Robert Bresson), 2011
C-Print, 81,6 x 92,4 cm

Production still

Three Films / Three Photographs - a critical
reader edited by Mario Pfeifer (ed.)
Published by Fotohof edition Vol. 181 in colla-
boration with KOW
ISBN: 978-3-902675-81-1

With contributions by Michael Ned Holte, Christy
Lange, Nicolas Linnert, Vanessa Joan Müller
and Vivien Trommer

This critical reader was conceived as a hindsights
of Pfeifer's first institutional solo presentation at
Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Germany
(2011). While the contributions discuss each
of the three autonomous projects, the graphic
design considers the color scheme and exhi-
bition layout the works were staged in. Three
publications that were presented in the exhibition
are reproduced and discussed in the publication,
while Pfeifer shares two recent conversations on
his previous projects and publications with inter-
locutors across generations, of different fields
and practices.

In tandem with the exhibition Three Films/ Three
Photographs (Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wies-
baden, Germany 2011), this publication endea-
vors to provide a contribution to the discussion
of current debates and focuses thematically upon
the global, cultural and medial condition of a so-
ciety that—in the words of Zygmunt Bauman—
cannot stand still, but is perpetually modernizing.
[from the introducing essay by Vivien Trommer,
2012]

Mario Pfeifer, Three Films / Three Photo-
graphs - a critical reader, 2013
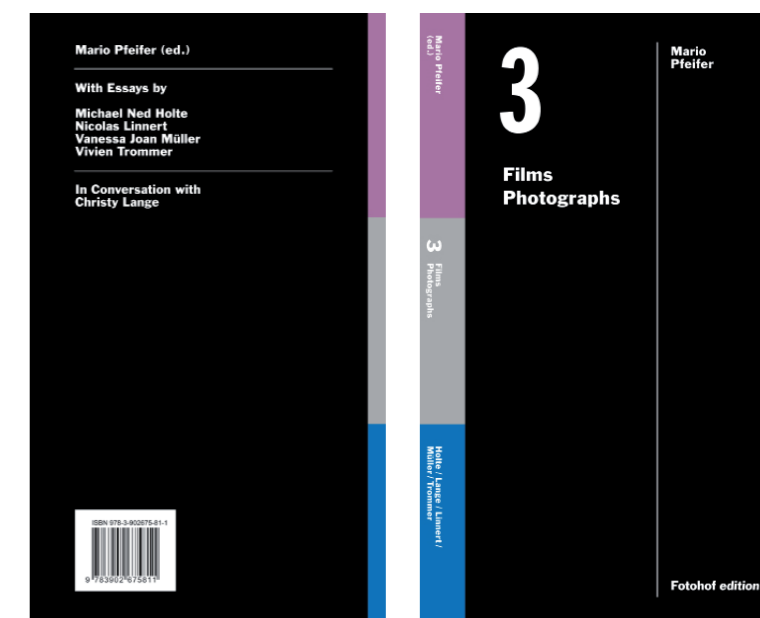
Exhibition view 'Antirepresentationalism III.
Issues of Empathy', KOW BERLIN, 2009

UNTITLED
["TWO GUYS"]
(2008)

Pfeifer's Untitled ["Two Guys"] is as subdued, even muted, ambient, as Rize is vibrant, frenetic, loud. The makeup worn by Sami and Yeisen points back to its origins in South Los Angeles and Tommy the Clown's genetic coding, but is rendered nearly invisible—a faint glow—in the insistent blue light of the tenement.

Style is a recognizable accumulation of signs, more or less legible to both an internal and external audience of sign readers. "Subcultural styles are more usefully regarded as mutations and extensions of existing codes rather than as the 'pure' expression of creative drives, and above all they should be seen as meaningful mutations," notes Dick Hebdige in his important book-length study of music-based subcultures such as punk and reggae, written in 1979. Sami and Yeisen's look and gestures will be familiar to other fans of hip-hop, whether or not they pass the purity test. They are nothing if not meaningful.

Of course, hip-hop has been a contested style for decades, long before the subjects in Pfeifer's video adopted its signs; krumping emerged, somewhat acrimoniously, from dancers who ran afoul of Tommy the Clown and his "school," before finding a "meaningful mutation," dislocated by and through these young men eager to establish an identity in Berlin. In his study of subculture, Hebdige notes, "Some groups have more say, more opportunity to make the rules, to organize meaning, while others are less favorably placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions of the world on the world."
6 Difficult as it may be to know these two guys, Sami and Yeisen, we can safely assume that they are not the rule makers. Their definitions of the world are borrowed, adapted, only provisionally made their own, much like the camera that follows them and then lets them escape from view.

Mario Pfeifer, Untitled ["Two Guys"], 2008

Text by Michael Ned Holte
Excerpt from What Key Be to Lock: On Untitled ["Two Guys"], 2012

HD-video 16:9, colour, stereo, 7 min
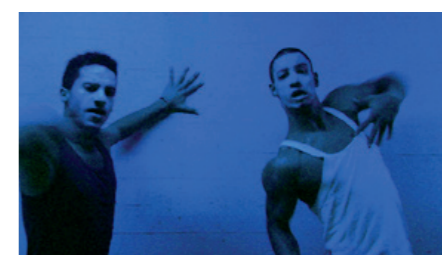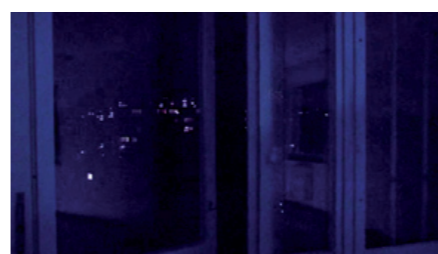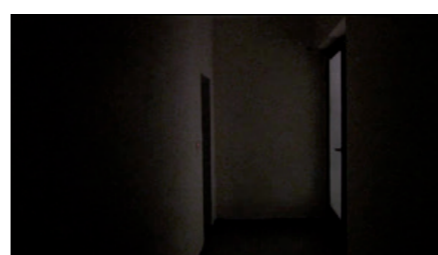
Mario Pfeifer, Untitled ["Two Guys"], 2008

HD-video 16:9, colour, stereo, 7 min

Credit Line

Untitled ["Two Guys"]

HD-video 16:9, colour, stereo, 7 min

Cast: Sami Moss Mardina, Yeisen Acosta
Medina
Cinematograpy: Matthias Biber
Montage: Mario Pfeifer
Sound design: Thomas Wallmann
Light design: Manuel Kinzer
Produced by Jakob Schillinger, Mario Pfeifer
[blackboardfilms]
Conceived by Mario Pfeifer

Funded by KulturAllianzen, Interflugs Berlin,
Asta Berlin

© 2008 Germany

Mario Pfeifer, Untitled ["Two Guys"], 2008

HD-video 16:9, colour, stereo, 7 min

Mario Pfeifer (*1981, Dresden, Germany) is a visual artist and filmmaker living and working in Berlin. His work explores representational structures and conventions in the medium of video, film and digital technology, in locations ranging from Mumbai to California to the Atacama dessert, the Brazilian Quarter in Lagos or the Western Sahara. He conceives each project out of a specific cultural situation, researches social-political backgrounds and weaves cross-cultural art historical, filmic, technological and political references into a richly layered practice, ranging from film and video installations to text installation and photography. Pfeifer was a Fulbright scholar, a recipient of DAAD fellowships in 2010 and 2012 and graduated from the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main in 2008. He particpated in the Biennals of Marrakesh (2011), Montevideo (2015), Porto Alegre (2018), and Berlin (2018). Pfeifer has received numerous project grants from different German foundations to realize global projects. He has collaborated with the Goethe-Instituts in Bangkok, Mumbai, New Dehli, Lagos, London, New York and Santiago de Chile. Pfeifer was an artist-residence at the International Studio and Curatorial Program [ISPC] in New York, Gasworks in London, and Cité des Art Internationales in Paris, for which the latter he was selected by the Federal Commissioner of Culture and Media (BKM), Germany. Sternberg Press and Spector Books have published monographs on Pfeifer's research and cultural projects. Numerous press reviews appeared in Artforum, The New York Times, Al Jazeera, Frankfurt Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, FAZ, taz, The Guardian, Kaleidoscope, Senses of Cinema, The Brooklyn Rail, ArtReview, Camera Austria, Monopol among many others. Pfeifer has lectured in Chile, Germany, India, Mexico, Poland, the U.K. and in the US.