

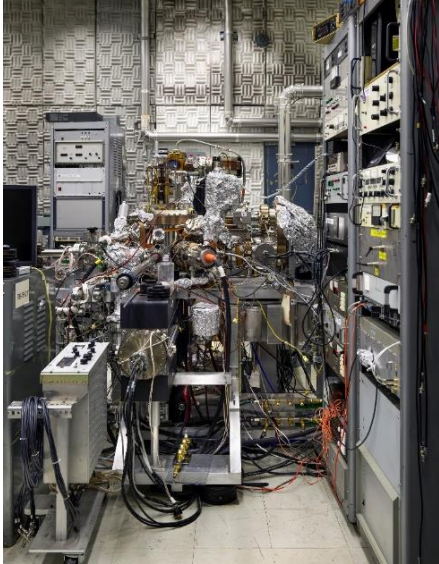
Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle

Thomas Struth

Nov 25, 2022 – Jan 14, 2023

Opening: Thursday, Nov 24, 2022, 6–8 p.m

The artist is present.



Thomas Struth, Low Energy Electron Microscope, IBM, Yorktown Heights 2022

A certain tranquility and focus inhabit the photographs of dead animals Thomas Struth took in the autopsy room of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research. The institution is dedicated to research on the human influence on our environment and examines the exact cause of death of recently deceased animals, most of which are brought in from the Berlin Zoo. In his images, Struth documents that transitory moment immediately after death, when life still seems to cling to the bodies of these animals.

A white-tailed eagle lies on its back, wings spread akimbo, head pointed downward as if it were to swoop to the ground to catch its prey. A zebra rests on a dark linoleum floor. In its top view, its bent forelimbs make it seem as though the animal were about to kneel. In contrast, the Sumatran tiger shot from a low angle against a laboratory backdrop looks as if we can still feel its breath, its extended paw and lowered head dangerously close to the camera's eye. All animals appear to share a bodily gesture whose subtle dynamics are in stark contrast to their dead state.

These are post-mortem portraits. Viewing them may at first produce a sense of distress. Jittering between beauty and asperity, the images are imbued with a sublime quality via the universal question of transience. One last time, a whiff of life blows into the camera's lens before the organic intricacies of life crumble into dead matter. What was once engrossed in power and energy is now ruled by silence.

But if we take a closer look at what we see as lifeless matter, we'll soon realize that the elements' dynamic bustle in fact knows no bounds. The European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) near Geneva uses particle accelerators to explore what holds the universe together at its core, and how it came to be in the first place. In the second part of the exhibition in the gallery's upper level, Thomas Struth shows new photographs of technological equipment, which he encountered at CERN as well as in the laboratories of the IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights (New York)—which specializes in quantum physics—and at the Space Center of IABG Ottobrunn.

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With his works, Struth raises questions about the use and effects of these technologies. What are the political dimensions hiding behind the curtain? What kinds of salvation do these technologies promise, and what are the consequences in terms of the human ability to shape and transmogrify nature in ever more drastic ways? Struth shows how virtually limitless human imagination is transformed into sculptural objecthood. He leads us to mysterious places, most of them hidden, with highly specialized contraptions whose functionality many of us do not yet grasp but whose potential impact on the lives of future generations is almost inconceivable.

The photographs presented in this exhibition are conspicuously devoid of humans, but their *agency* is omnipresent. At once creators and destroyers, humans seem to hold the fate of the planet in their creative hands. It is only in the face of death that the promise of progress loses its power. The finitude of life draws the line for our creativity. While far above the clouds a satellite tracks how the distribution of water masses has changed here on Earth (GRACE-Follow-On Bottom View, IABG, Ottobrunn 2017), a tectonically battered rock formation is lodged in the ground, whose geological age lets human history shrivel to the blink of an eye (Ellsworth Schist, Rockport, Maine 2021).

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