

VOID

Text by Giulio Piovesan

Looking at the pictures by Frank Breuer, I am reminded of a game I used to play when I was a kid: I kept on repeating the same word to myself until it was left void of all its content, its meaning. What I was left with was just a stream of letters, an empty box. The starting point of a new quest of sense and identity: the meaning of the box itself. The same happens when I look at the warehouses and containers that this student of Bernd Becher has been photographing in northern Europe. These big, colourful, rectangular shapes, swinging between abstraction and extreme reality, are the core of a photography which requires to be investigated because of its puzzling minimalism. "I take pictures of objects that have different layers of meaning", says Breuer. "I began with war memorials: sculptures that will last forever in the landscape, unchanged. They have a precise function and the power to evoke different concepts, exactly the same features of my logo series which make you think of the products and the advertising, the international exchange of goods and other commercial issues... They are contemporary things made to construct a... sense of our world". Yet, there is something profoundly disturbing about them: their complete stillness due to the absence of any form of human life. "These boxes right in the middle of the landscape remind me of an alien landing. They are familiar to you but you are not sure exactly what they are. Nevertheless, being man-made they belong to the human world; you have the chance to see them everyday while driving your car or passing through industrial areas. Moreover, pictures are necessarily related to the viewer who accepts them." Thus photography creates a dialogue with the audience, inspiring feelings and questions rather than merely showing them real, physical objects. Again, at the base of Breuer's works there is the power to evoke something beyond his minimal subjects, suggesting a contemporary approach to metaphysics. "Managing to make people reflect on what is behind the subject is far more important than making it appear beautiful. Really good pictures must seduce with their layers of meaning. When it comes to my subjects, I always have an idea of what I am looking for: I am attracted by sculpture and strangeness in relation to the landscape... The use of colour allows me to be more faithful to how things look and also to emphasize the contrast between these boxes and what surrounds them, thus producing a sense of abstraction... I work with the scale and large dimensions [and] because of their colour and shape... the containers look like huge Lego bricks- it is just like we are playing in the environment... What matters is not

the single shot, but the overall idea of the complete series, where the contrast between the cubic objects and the landscape is deeply felt". And it is precisely the intervention of the human factor: that is to say, the choices of the author and the sensibility of the viewer, that enables what, in literary theory, is called the vertical reading of the text - the perception of something beyond the mere fact/subject, narrated/depicted. In this way, the juxtaposition of an objective reality and its personal, subjective experience poses itself at the centre of discussion about the identity, meaning, function, and above all, the artistic properties of documentary photography.

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