

Pressrelease

LANDMARK RODRIGO VALENZUELA

In the works of Rodrigo Valenzuela (b.1982, Chile, currently lives and works in Los Angeles) the wastelands of the American landscape meet the economic ruins; and the reality of the American working class meets the failure of the American dream. Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer shows “Landmark” – Valenzuela’s first (solo-) exhibition in Europe.

It sounds almost too good to be true: In the USA land is given away for free. For anyone who has long buried his dream of being a house owner, and who is not willing to pay off a far too large loan for the next 25 years, this may sound like the American Dream come true. From nothing to home ownership. Literally. Because the land is not situated close to the Hamptons or the Hollywood Hills but in far less populated areas instead. And this means: Right in the middle of nowhere. But what drives people to move to these rural regions? And what will remain if these newly built, artificially accelerated infrastructures fail?

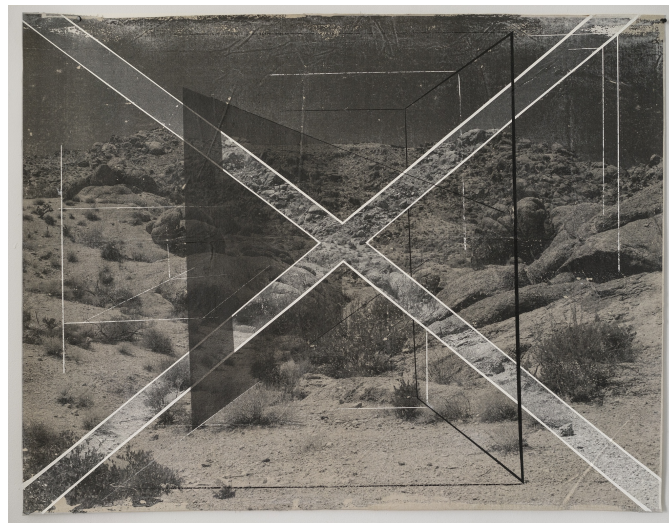
For Rodrigo Valenzuela the answer seems simple: It is people’s craving for possession and their urge to display it. On his drives, often lasting for days, from Chile over Mexico through vast parts of the USA, he frequently came across deserted architectures, symbols, signs and fences that marked the ownership of land. People hardly ever live there (anymore). Valenzuela’s paintings become an almost ironic reference to the failure of the American Dream, to the failure of the new infrastructures. He gradually empties the photographs he shot on his journeys through the country until they turn into fictional places. The (artificial) wasteland is photocopied and transferred from paper to canvas. Only the pictorial, geometric structures on the canvas indicate markers of property. Here, right in the middle of nowhere the scaffolding — as a minimal gesture of architecture — becomes a symbol for the (economic) ruins of our present. Other than in Rome these ruins fail to reconstruct centuries of human history. And still, or perhaps precisely because of it, we do not associate the kind beauty with them that seems to be engraved in the remains of castles and palaces. Regardless whether it is caused by economic crises, natural disasters or war: The ruin of the present is marked by pain. Just as the daily news coverage. And consequently, one might think that the world has changed for the worse. But the good news is: We are simply drawn to depressing and bad news. But why?

“Hedonic Reversal” is a term used to describe a psychological state in which one actively strives for pain and sadness — and it is also the title of a series of photographs of Valenzuela, in which he strips the ruin of its stories and emotions. Which aesthetic dimensions does a ruin convey that was never meant to be anything but a ruin? A relict, defined by a lack of history and place and its intended temporality?

In his studio, Valenzuela creates artificial ruins – which consist of new building materials and old stucco elements. A time-consuming work process follows: The installations are photographed, then this photograph is integrated into the “film-set” and photographed once more. The superimposition of different photographic layers within a space shapes the result by the processual quality and the passage of time. Still, the works are free of pain; they are oscillating

between decay and new futuristic constructions. And it is the working process itself that makes reference to Valenzuela's own history: to his immigration to the USA. To the complex procedure, which is characterized by a high degree of bureaucracy that the photocopies in his paintings refer to. And to his years of work experience in the construction industry immediately following his entry to the US. Valenzuela, who comes from a working-class family from Chile, challenges the perception of the working class in the USA. In his specifically produced telenovela "Maria TV" he dismantles the image of the Latin American maid or nanny commonly projected by the media. "Maria TV" is both documentary and fiction at the same time. Dream and reality encounter. The real stories of the protagonists meet the scripts of American soap operas. They get rid of the constructed clichés and the fictional, somewhat exciting stories of everyday life. From maid to It girl? From rags to riches? Some Hollywood-style stories are still artificially kept alive like a collective dream scenario. Even if reality has long taught us otherwise.

Sabrina Möller



Rodrigo Valenzuela

Sense of Place #12, 2016

Acrylic, toner, chalk on canvas

114.3 x 86.4 cm

OPENING: 24. 10. 2016

DURATION: 25. 10. - 02. 12. 2016

ADDRESS: Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer, Brucknerstraße 4, 1040 Wien

OPENING HOURS: Di.-Fr. 11:00 - 19:00 / Sa. 11:00 - 16:00

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