

HOP-ART PHOTOGRAPHY

THE PHOTOGRAPHER - HERBERT HOPFENSBERGER IN RESEARCH OF THE LIGHT OF ARTISTIC INTUITION

„Let there be light!“ Or so start all creation myths, whether from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu origin. Even the scientifically-based Big Bang theory cannot do without the notion of a spontaneous release of light and energy. Light means more than light. Light is brightness, heat, energy, electricity, fire and sun. The biblical account of creation, like the Big Bang theory, corresponds light with origin and beginning. And it means knowledge. Philosophers of the West and the East have both spoken about The “Light of Knowledge”. Metaphors such as „reconnaissance“ and „enlightenment“ point to the same direction. Plato uses the Allegory of the Cave, Lao-tzu’s thought revolves around the symbol of the rising sun.

Herbert Hopfensperger is a contemporary light artist. Although raised as a Catholic, he denies any suspicion to be a religious person. If he don’t screw up there! His religiosity may not be reflected in prayer and church attendance, but rather in his artistic manifestations. Herbert Hopfensperger knows the secrets of light on the track and utilizes the latest technological and digital resources in his work. With his pictorial innovations he proves just as Vermeer, William Turner and the French Impressionists to be an artist who has opened with artistic means a whole range of new possibilities for the display of light.

The spiritual dimension of his multi-media created light images may be explained with traumatic experiences in youth. At the age of nineteen Hopfensperger has first survived a serious motorcycle accident, and a year later sixty meter fall with an off-road vehicle in the Ötztal Alps. The near-death experiences associated with these life-threatening disasters may have opened to the artist the inner eye to areas beyond our everyday perception and awakened in him the desire for a light that is not of this world.

Until the development of his pictorial potential, however, it was a long way. Herbert Hopfensperger was born in 1962 in Prien am Chiemsee, and had always the majestic, illuminated view of Alps under the sun and the snow of winter. He grew up in and around Munich and finished his academic and practical training as a mechanical engineer. He worked as such for several years before moving to a private TV channel 1993 and there he took up an activity in which the use of the new media with the camera and the computer was part of everyday job.

Herbert Hopfensperger discovered the photography when he was a teenager. In 1980 he bought the smallest reflex camera available at that time, a Pentax A110. The handy pocket size was however too small for the photo agencies. So he finally got hold of a bigger reflex camera, a Minolta 9000 with the first autofocus and soon found for his more perfect photographs professional buyers. Equipped with three lenses and a flash, he focused on landscapes and took the early nineties a photo trip to Vietnam. In 1998 he changed to a Nikon F5 with lenses and most modern accessories. He teamed up with other nature photographers and received for his landscape and wild-life photography diverse recognition.

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He photographed the life of the Tuaregs in the inland of Libya and made friendships that have enriched him humanly and accompanied him to this day. Herbert Hopfensperger discovered his special photo technique in the years 2004 and 2005. For an agency, he should produce night shots of individual light sources. The customer refused this work, however, as too mystical, but the fascination of the fixed and moving lights in the dark, had not released the photographer from then on. He has continued to develop his visionary perspective and representation and he finally developed his own style, unparalleled in the German as well as in international art scene.

Three components work together: the knowing eye of the beholder, the source of light which stands or moves, and the camera which focuses on the light-source, sometimes following it and sometimes getting away from it. However, the camera is always there, where the light is, as if it has fallen in love with the light. The light is at the center, magical, imaginary, transparent, immanent, transcendental: in any case, mysterious and unfathomable, an important role of symmetry. The light does not spread randomly. It follows the drawn lines. Curved, bent, wavy light shines with severe or even playful symmetry in two or four directions. There are virtually no straight lines, no rough edges. Instead, his lights begin to draw curves, to dance and to flow. Light and energy-flows mix into one another, connect and disconnect as couples who dance together on a ring. The light itself is never static, as if it comes from a light bulb; it moves, it flickers, it glows, it shines, it's full of secrets; as if the artist has succeeded in making the transcendent glow of an astral body visible.

Herbert Hopfensperger sparked veritable fireworks. With his eye, his light source and his camera, he conjures up an almost Bengal fire. The pictures on pages 42 to 48 and 52 appear to be painted with fire. They shine like liquid steel. They catch the eye of the beholder and virtually set him on fire. Any one who asks the artist for the secrets of his light art, will quickly notice that he is not a man of many words, instead he lets his pictures speak for themselves. At first glance, one might get the impression of a purely abstract art. But on closer inspection, you can see an abundance and diversity of highly symbolic figurations. The viewer is reminded of the swinging and floating green, bluish and pale red garlands of the Northern Lights. His imagination knows no limits for depicting distant lightning or satellite images of oceans on which the moonlight is reflected. The first light images through which Herbert Hopfensperger has shown his developed his new technology (on pages 3 to 11) seem to me like abstract symbolic visualizations of pure electricity.

Energy is made visible by means of artistic representation. At the same time, the artist processed the latest findings from astrophysics and nuclear research. and other elementary particles seem to spread in the speed of light, as if the cosmos had just been created from light. Looking at the next light images leads you to look back to the early stages of the universe. The galaxies are emerging, they arrange themselves, related to one another, they are directed symmetrically (the pictures on pages 13 to 20). Again, energy is released, but this spread isn't eruptive, but according to a given law and in accordance to the principles of aesthetics.

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The new world created from light is extraordinarily beautiful. It sets the standards for all the things we perceive as beautiful and pure. In the light-art of Herbert Hopfensperger the ugly has no place. For him, everything is light. With this message the artist is aware of his being against the spirit of the time and against the prevailing taste, which prefers the gloomy and demonic mode. For the photographer from Bavaria, the light remains pure. „Light pollution“ as observed by more and more critics and tired urban civils, can not be applied to his work. What is beautiful? Most contemporary artists stay away from this basic question of art as the devil keeps away from holy water. Herbert Hopfensperger's image sequence on pages 21 to 33 strikes me as a study of an aesthetic program, as if he wants to find out what counts as beautiful to the human eye. He decrypts the blueprint of the universe. The outcome of this is his criteria for the definition of beauty: it should be bright, light and clear, colorful and ordered in in an symmetrical axis. follows the aesthetic laws of nature; this shines through his light images: flowers, leaves, cypress, palm trees and volcanic mountains are applied symmetrically, as well as the face and the body of animals and humans. Everything is inter-related, everything is connected to everything. In this way the artist symbolizes the light of what holds the world together at the core, what connects us with people even with the most distant galaxy. We are made of star dust that accumulate base on inscrutable rules around a magnet.

Herbert Hopfensperger's works are ambiguous. They can be cosmic, macro- or microcosmic, mystical or esoteric. Some of them can be, unquestionably, erotically interpreted too. Looking at the iridescent, fluorescent and transcendent images on pages 63, 65, 66, 67, 69, 74, 76 and 80, one feels repeatedly the images of to a female womb, a womb and other manifestations of the „eternal feminine“ as Goethe recalls. With this symbolic language, the artist is on his tracks of human existence as well as in his cosmic designs. With the magical means of expression and his photo art, he leads us sensitively, gently but insistentlly back to our primal beginnings. We are children of light, we are born of light and return to light after we have passed through the valley of darkness. Who would not be reminded of such famous images of light-verse from the Koran: „The likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light!“

Herbert Hopfensperger's images will not only be seen and admired as technical masterpieces, they also invite the one who has eyes to make some meditation, prayer and self-reflection. They are mirror images of our own souls. They expand our consciousness and confront us softly and suggestively with the question of questions: Where did we come from and where are we going?

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