

# BRUNO STETTLER

FOTOGRAFIEN PRINTS VIDEOS



## **Picture fragments of eroded realities 1980 - 2009**

Contact-photo sheet covers, that have been stored for decades, can progressively damage photographic paper. This was a bitter lesson that Zurich photographer, Bruno Stettler, born 1962, had to face after opening his carefully guarded photo archives the first time in 30 years.

The popular protective PVC contact-photo sheet covers that were used in the 80's literally enhanced the development of mould, if they were not stored at the correct temperature. Actually, not only the development, but the covers also created the perfect growth conditions for the mould's prosperity too! It was Stettler's terrible experience to discover that this mould had continuously been gnawing at what he thought were his carefully-stored collection of photographs.

As a result, the artist is currently working through his decay-threatened photo archives, which not only contain real photographic treasures and memoirs, but historically significant images too.

Surprising, novel, emotional

Bruno Stettler's photographs were, until recently, unpublished. They were all taken in an "artist's moment" - For himself, and not on request or for contract. This is pertinent as it is only now, during the reproduction of his photographic past, that he sees the significance of his intuitive shots. It is often only in hindsight that one can see the essence of a picture taken and the artist now recognises that many are documents of great depth, capturing the spirit of the times. For him this has been an extremely important step on his road to becoming an artistic documentary photographer.

In this context, Stettler's pictures can be described as the forerunners of the actual handycam culture. His photographs have defined this tradition with exaggerated hazes, grainy textures and diffused colours, unfocused and unstructured objects but with the clear hard facts of image sections as the uncompromised, close-up and focal themes. From sharp contrasts and the illusion of movement, to the vague suggestions by amorously dissolving subjects through soft focusing, he has explored and applied many artistic

techniques. This intensive and ground-breaking experimental development has therefore become the hallmark of Stettler's photographic production. While his aesthetic construction not only influences artistic photography today, it will also decisively impact on the photography of tomorrow as his versatile works have already proved to anticipate the fundamentals of later art and photographic trends.

Dozens of test series with the Lomo camera

Among other things, this experimental approach resulted in Bruno Stettler receiving a commission from the Vienna Lomographic Society, in the late 90's, to find new development potential for the Lomo camera.

After conducting dozens of tests with various types of glass, plastic and colour film-effects which, for example, made the photographs appear monochrome, Stettler came up with a novel idea – A set of well-priced filters for laser-light and colour-effects which could, as an option, be adapted to the zoom lens of the Lomo camera. Unfortunately, with the technical development of the digital camera, further research into this project was stopped. Clearly his urge to research his passion does not let him rest and in 2008, with all his experience, Stettler started to rework and revive these old experiments, adapting them for use on digital cameras. It was then that he discovered all his damaged photographic works in his archives.

Although it may appear to an untrained eye that the images of his works have been edited by a computer or with filters, due to the psychedelic and hallucinogenic expressions and impressions, be assured that all the artist's photographs are technically completely authentic pictures. Theories to the contrary are completely unfounded and it is pure coincidence that Stettler's subjects are personal in nature – family, celebrations, home and friends. There again, it is another co-incidence that this is actually appreciated in today's understanding of photography and falls within the fashionable theme of "a view into authentic life".

His photographs look similar to oil paintings, when scanned as enlargements and printed on canvas, but all of these current, amorphous and psychedelic works of art are from archived copies dating back to the 70's and 80's. And all, sadly, are in the process of disintegration, as mentioned previously. It is incredible what the so widely-used PVC covers did to the contact-photo sheets after 30 years of storage, in temperatures ideal for the development of mould. It is also amazing that mould changed the original photographs so drastically that neither shape nor colour of the original appears recognisable anymore. Stettler's artworks have become living images! They adapt and change each year and, as such, the steps of this process can only be recorded with his applied scan-techniques. With his latest collection of work, Stettler sequentially documents his now-eroding photo-realities before their demise. Fascinatingly, on their road to ruin, their blurred images, dream-like details and illusory silhouettes only make them more and more beautiful as time goes by!  
Sascha Serfoezoe, August 2008

New Series of Works 2008/2009

Bruno Stettler's latest series of works impress with technical quality that does not overshadow his art. In addition to the afore-mentioned mould-erosion of his photographs, there are also the intentionally chemically-ruined large-sized photoworks, which lend a quality of mysterious surrealism to the collection.

## Organic-Varicoloured Transcendence

The self-taught Bruno Stettler has experimented for a long time with different chemical methods, in an attempt to expose his reproduced pictures, on real photo-paper, to a targeted process of disintegration. By involving experts in the field of chemistry, he succeeded in developing a method for a controlled corrosion of these pictures. The result was a technique which can be adopted as a pictorial medium in order to give pictures, which have been reproduced on high-grade photo-paper, an unstructured psychedelic dimension. The chemical method converts each individual print into an unmistakable and unique original. The additional outcome of this technique is a complex chemical process that mysteriously continues to change the artwork as though the process was still in progress. This makes the picture seem organic and alive. It was these influential substances that Stettler and his team used to give the new series of works their psychedelic effects.

It is also this transcendency which ultimately gives multi-dimensional ambiguity to the studies of female eroticism as it is due to the chemical influences that these pictures appear in flowery organic colours of endlessly multi-layered secrecy and depth.

It is not simple to understand or summarise these astounding works as a whole as the more one peruses and reflects upon them, the more new perspectives and insights are gained. Through chemical intervention they appear pictorial but they are also artistically unmistakably and powerfully energetic. Even though they refer to the psychedelic forms of expression of the photography and art of the late 60's and early 70's, these works are definitely not retro but rather artistic and aesthetic-pleasing portrayals the topical questions of today.

Sascha Serfoezoe, November 2008

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