

Laura Schawelka

TENDER

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We continue to believe that photographic images make it possible for us to grasp the world. Neither the "incantation" of the end of photography, triggered by the digitization of the 1990s nor the posting, liking and sharing on the Internet have been able to change anything about this. Photographic practices and behavior determine our individual and collective life through their representative and communicative function. Photography undoubtedly belongs to a powerful part of our everyday routine, to which we, therefore, attribute an exceptional value. Already the decision what we photograph (or don't photograph) and for what purpose leads us to think about valuation criteria beyond our Instagram-Posts. What has value to be represented? Which form of representation is valuable? Ultimately, our criteria point to current societal needs and perceptions.

The question of the value of photography in an economically oriented society is at the center of Laura Schawelka's expansive installation in her exhibition TENDER, which includes photography, video, and sculpture. The exhibition title TENDER allows several meanings in its German translation. As an adjective, tender means *soft* or *gentle*; as a verb, it is translated as *care*. The noun *tender*, on the other hand, is a technical term of the financial world that stands for *offer* or *means of payment*. The ambiguity of the term precisely encompasses the layers of meaning of Schawelka's works. She regards the medium of photography as an ideological and material exchange of our consumer society, which tends to trigger our emotions. She focuses her attention in particular to fashion and advertising photography, which seduces with elaborate aesthetic strategies to generate desire. Among the networks of Schawelka's photography, the mechanisms of power of bartering are gently obscured, while often in the foreground only the net (of photography) itself remains visible.

Silver pearls, made of ephemeral sugar, are tempting, so is an ivory hand, a softly draped fabric, and pastel hues. The luxury perfume of the brand BVLGARI, presented weightlessly on a plastic hand but supposed to be worn invisibly on your skin, costs 300 euros. In a delicate advertising aesthetic, Schawelka captures a shop window scene at the luxury department store Fondaco de Tedeschi in Venice. A thread that fastens the flacon to the hand, in Schawelka's large aluminum-framed photograph, is a quickly striking rupture in the illusion. In another photograph, she just as seductively presents the head side of a two-euro coin by putting it on the pink lips of a Vogue photograph. It shows a hand-throwing a ballot into an urn and thus performs an image within an image. The Maltese two-euro coin, like all others, is worth two euros - but because of its limited run, collectors pay significantly more for the commemorative coin.

Under the black net fabric of a fashion shirt, hands from sections of historical paintings or even a historical artefact can be seen in other works in the show. The focus lies on the net fabric and thus coquettishly distracts from the action of the underlying motifs. Money is clearly reduced in the cut-outs to a symbol of exchange, the change of values. The original painting of one of the sections is by Cecco del Caravaggio (Francesco Boneri 1610 - 1615) "Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple." It tells the story of how Jesus expelled unscrupulous merchants who enriched themselves with the faith of pilgrims by selling them materials for offerings when they arrived at the temple. The one receiving or protecting the currency holds power physically *in his hand*, but there are also symbolic and ideational values. Another picture shows the "Main de Justice," a scepter made of precious materials carried by French kings since the 13th century as a sign of jurisdiction at their coronation. Napoleon had it replicated for his coronation after the original got lost in the French Revolution. Signs are often more powerful than money, and people tend to believe them with pleasure. In advertising, the hand is, therefore, a powerful tool.

The cropping of a context and the blur are essential and typical photographic means with which Schawelka also addresses the value of photography in everyday use. Often blurred, out of focus pictures that have no purpose and seemingly do not serve any information are thrown away or deleted. Schawelka pays special attention to these pictures in her exhibition. For example, a blurred image of an escalator is printed on a large advertising banner, giving it an extensive presence. Accordingly, the chrome-plated grids, as recurring elements of her installation, also undergo a reevaluation. They are removed from their function as product displays and stand here as steel indications of their origin. A game of value reversal and value creation can be found in all of Laura Schawelka's works. Photography is an accomplice in the processes of value attribution, beyond that it generates value for itself.

Olga Holzschuh