

Erik van der Weijde, Taking Pictures

By Taco Hidde Bakker, 2014

Erik van der Weijde does not think of himself as a photographer, nor is he terribly fond of the act of taking photographs, although the camera is his main 'tool of expression'. He photographs on an almost daily basis. His artistic practice is interwoven with family life, hence his wife and son often appear in his photographs. Other topics include the built environment: architecture most importantly, besides moveable objects such as airplanes, cars, guns or bonsai trees.

Van der Weijde runs his own publishing enterprise, called *4478ZINE*. His photographic activities almost exclusively relate to projects that he plans to later publish in book form. After he has decided on a new topic of inquiry, he prepares meticulously for his photographic journeys so that each destination is planned in advance.

Why photography? It has to do with memories of his childhood years and the holidays that he has spent with his parents in Bavaria. The photographs that remain of these journeys spark cherished recollections. Furthermore, Van der Weijde uses photography to bring time to a standstill. He associates his photography with the wish to retain memories of fleeting moments. By photographing his son he can somehow keep him a little boy. Perhaps, in passing, the photographer himself remains young as well.

After having photographed his son for many years, Van der Weijde finally decided to publish an artist's book with a series of photographs in which his son is seen sleeping. It took a long time before he felt ready to publish the work because not only do they show his son in an intimate setting, the photographer reveals his own vulnerability

too. In *Privacy Settings* (2013) he implicitly asks questions about what it means to be an artist. He is the father standing in the room where his son is asleep, secretly taking pictures of him – the result of which is a certain objectification of something very personal.

Most of Van der Weijde's photographs appear to be deceptively simple, bland almost. He wants to photograph things as simply and direct as possible, so that he won't be exposed as a professional photographer. Photos are always taken from a standing position at eye level, making identification easy. People looking at his work will – hopefully – ask themselves 'What is it that I'm looking at?' It is the need to look beyond immediate appearances that motivates Van der Weijde. Taking photographs of subjects that appeal to him is like the child lifting stones to see what lies underneath.

To make photographs and assemble them thematically in series of artists' publications constitutes a form of archiving and collecting. The value of photography, and one of the reasons why Van der Weijde uses the medium in a straightforward and repetitive way, is related to his 'desire to possess and to collect'. Photography is a way of collecting the world in all its appearances, in public and private spaces alike. Furthermore, photos become evidence of having been to places or having had experiences. Collecting memories by means of photography makes those memories more palpable.

Van der Weijde has an ongoing fascination with German history. In 2014 he published *Third Reich*, which forms the first of a series in progress informally titled 'Bavaria Trilogy'. All of his publications related to architectural expressions of Nazism can be traced back to his memories of the Bavarian holidays of his childhood, recalled as 'the happiest moments of the year'. While playing hide-and-seek at

the campsite with his holiday friends he once found a little case with collector's cards about the Third Reich. They burned the case in the camping stove, knowing there was something shady about it – an action Van der Weijde now regrets.

His artist's books related to the Nazi-period (1933-1945) are an attempt to reconstruct those remembrances from childhood, to recollect the lost memories. It is at once a highly personal enterprise as well as a distant reviewing and revisiting of one of the most chaotic periods of recent European history. Van der Weijde's constant transatlantic traversing between his home in Brazil and other continents, most of all his native Europe, support that distant view. He thinks it's perhaps easier to work through such heavy topics from a tropical perspective. This can also be felt through the non-dramatic style of photography, in which architecture and landscape appear to be peaceful and innocent. However, once you delve deeper into the specifics of where the pictures were taken and what histories are buried in these friendly appearances, at second glance you will see something different: for example in one photograph the school building behind the elegant pine tree turns out to be the elementary school that provided Adolf Hitler his basic education.

Should an artist be assigned any kind of moral task? Should he have a message? According to Van der Weijde art can't change or influence any political matter decisively, but what he deems important is that viewers should pose questions for themselves. That they will be stimulated to start investigating the world on their own.

If Van der Weijde has any dominant message, it is embodied in the following imperative: 'Go outside and search and research for

yourself'. Things in the world are never presented and represented without second thought. A question necessary for everyone to ask is: 'Why are things (re)presented the way they are?' Art is just one of a multitude of possible responses to ways of being in and looking at the world.

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