

Manuel Graf (Manuel Graf)
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(translated from French by Molly Stevens)



View of "Michael Hakimi" 2010.

altered light. Hakimi's sculpture itself achieves a comparable transformation, and therein lies the idiosyncratic poetry of his work. Yet it makes an utterly down-to-earth and prosaic first impression. His sculptures are almost always made of simple materials such as fiberboard, cardboard, string, newspaper, T-shirt fabric, or cast concrete, and his process is always immediately apparent—there is no secret, no veneer of virtuosity. Instead he gives us formal reduction and minimalist arrangement: simple but nevertheless ingenious strategies for probing the boundaries between image and sculpture, free abstraction and intractable thingsness.

Some of the works were responses to the site: Three bronze statues from the sculpture garden were reproduced slightly larger than their original size as black-and-white photocopies, then laminated onto white-painted MDF as stand-up displays. *Italienerin (groß)* (Italian Woman [Large]) and *Italienerin (klein)* (Italian Woman [Small]) (all works 2010) are based on *Italienerin*, 1941–43, by Karl Geiser, a sculpture visitors pass as they enter the park. Hakimi photographed the striding female nude in profile along with its pedestal—from both sides—and presented these images in two-dimensional juxtaposition, paraphrasing and in a sense dissecting the spatiotemporally sequential nature of perception demanded by the work's sculptural model. These hybrid "picture sculptures" simulate the illusion of space both explicitly and transparently.

The installation was like a stage set that could be entered, oriented around a potential vanishing point. The works came together as site-specific arrangements that one could only grasp by walking through the installation, making the show read as a multifocus obstacle course through a series of objectlike abstractions. The scene one encountered first included not only the doubly duplicated *Italienerin* but also *R*, a black-and-white image, likewise presented as a stand-up display. The title names something we couldn't quite see: The greatly enlarged letter *R*—in white on black—has been perforated all around its edges as if with an outsize hole punch until it is scarcely legible any longer and thus appears all the more starkly as an autonomous, plastic form. *Luftblasenhermeneutik* (Bubble Hermeneutics) produces a similar translation: What might appear to be a simple abstraction is an enlarged print of the Bubble Wrap often used to protect art during transport. *Satellitenhütchen I* (Satellite Dish I) huddled turtlelike on the floor. Here, too, the title reveals what is concealed by the work's ostensible simplicity: The piece is a concrete cast of a satellite dish, flipped over and placed on a rolling cart. With Hakimi, the most tacit work is often the best, thanks to the striking simplicity with which what is given is transformed.

—Jens Asthoff
Translated from German by Oliver E. Drifuss.

FÖHR, GERMANY/SYLT, GERMANY

Thomas Wrede
MUSEUM KUNST DER WESTKÜSTE/
KUNST:RAUM SYLT QUELLE

All that can be seen for miles is an undefined milky white surface. Amid a welter of footprints, two tiny figures meander toward the horizon. *Im Nebel* (In the Fog), 2004, is part of Thomas Wrede's series "Am Meer" (Seascapes), 2001–2007—images that show people seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Sometimes we see these figures strolling by the waterside or just standing in the shallow waters of the river Watt. Sometimes the people are barely visible between the tufts of grass poking out of the dunes, as in *Dünengras mit Sitzenden* (Marram Grass with People Sitting in the Sand), 2005; sometimes they are absent, as in *Strandkörbe II* (Roofed Wicker Beach Chairs II), 2005, in which we see only covered wicker loungers scattered about a beach like building blocks.

Wrede's photographs are all about the boundaries that define artificiality and the difficulty of pinning down the real. While his "Seascapes" are expansive and characterized by panoramic views, his series "Real Landscapes," 2005–, concentrates on close-ups. These pictures draw their power from an extreme depth of focus. Every detail can be made out—and this proves confusing. What on first glance look like distant cars or settlements in the desert turns out to be models in a heap of sand. Looking more closely, you can recognize fingerprints and other details that allow you to get a sense of the proportions.

Both series were shot in North Frisia, many on the more-than-half-mile-wide beach of Amrum. Presented under the exhibition title "Anywhere" on the neighboring North Frisian Islands of Föhr (Museum Kunst der Westküste) and Sylt (Kunst:Raum Sylt Quelle), these photographs also play with the idea of the islands as objects of longing. At the Kunst:Raum Sylt Quelle, the two new series have been hung beside older ones, including "Magic Worlds," 1998—photographs of fun scenes in amusement parks—and "Domestic Landscapes," 2000–2001, which focuses on the strange world of living-room wallpaper. Reality and artifice collide so violently in these works that you find yourself studying every detail in disbelief—but nothing here has been staged; it is only the framing that unmasks a world filled with clichéd desire.

Whereas displaying these photographs on Sylt, Germany's most popular vacation island, creates a spatial connection to the landscape of the dunes, the Wolk's presentation in the museum on Föhr puts them in a context of historical seascapes. The Museum Kunst der Westküste is also exhibiting part of its own collection of paintings and graphic works from the period 1830–1930. These pictures tell of life along the North Sea coast from Norway to Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands: fishermen at work, sublime landscapes, forbidding natural elements. Beauty and threat lie close together in Wrede's work, too, but without real-life dangers such as storms or high seas. It is only the mood, the huge emptiness or ice-cold severity, that takes on psychodramatic force in the infinite isolation of "Seascapes" and "Real Landscapes." While the compositions of the historical paintings keep pointing to the



Thomas Wrede, *Strandhotel (Beach Hotel)*, 2008, color photograph, 55 1/4 x 70 1/4. From the series "Real Landscapes," 2005–.

insignificance of human beings in the face of natural forces, the grandeur and sense of threat in Wrede's work are staged solely in the viewer's head. This juxtaposition makes clear how much our perception of the maritime world has shifted. The sea is no longer so much a place of relation to which people live and work; rather, it is a backdrop for our interplay between microcosm and macrocosm. Every sandy dune contains the desert, every pebble is an island—and what we are seeing may well be an illusion. But it is also a reality that can be found in every detail, and so, by playing with proportions, Wrede is also laying claim to a grain of truth.

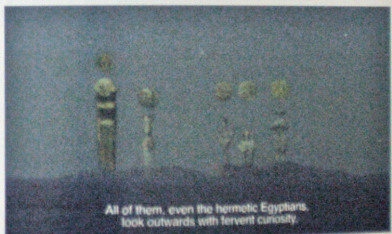
—Sabine B. Vogel

Translated from German by Oliver E. Drifuss.

BRUSSELS

Manuel Graf
ETABLISSEMENT D'EN FACE

German artist Manuel Graf's exhibition "Mediterraneo" (Mediterranean) opened with its invitation card, which lay upon a table and revealed an image similar to an illustration from an archaeological exhibition catalogue—that is to say, showing a series of artifacts and isolated documents against a black background. The card gave the exhibition title in several languages: Italian (*Mediterraneo*), Greek (Μεσόγειος), Turkish (*Akdeniz*), and Arabic (البحر الأبيض). This title designated the show as a single overall installation: a work from 2010 conceived of for the space. Having noticed this invitation with its encyclopedic, even Wikipedia-esque accents, one proceeded to the enclosure of the art center, where one discovered an arrangement of objects in the



Manuel Graf, *Mediterraneo*, 2010, still from a color video, 10 minutes, 56 seconds.

window: pieces of seemingly ancient pottery placed on metal shelves, accompanied by a hardy decorative plant as well as a tripod lamp.

This scene evoked the shopwindow of a modest store with little concern for the principles of marketing, perhaps similar to some in the surrounding Comte de Flandre/Dansaert neighborhood of Brussels, which is a hip area populated mostly by immigrants. But a closer look at the pottery divulged oddities in its making and its typology. And one noted the distance that Graf brought into play between these vernacular, handmade objects and the industrial look of the shelves.

A straddling of the outside context and that of a formal exhibition also occurred within the gallery itself, which was transformed into a sitting room with a coir rug, seating, and an outmoded coffee table: a sitting room with a colonial atmosphere, oriented toward a screen on which was projected a looped video that was the heart of the exhibition. This video presented a series of views of the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent terrain, as well as images and three-dimensional models of

ceramics, and more abstract passages created through digital animation, with a sound track combining voice-over and musical pieces (notably performed by Graf, who is also a musician). In a pseudo-scientific tone, the narrator recounted the history of peoples having lived along the Mediterranean Sea. The partially true, partially absurd text was inspired by the famous book on the Mediterranean by the French historian Fernand Braudel. Inevitably, one allowed oneself to be lulled by this voice, which seemed to suggest the eternity of civilizations, despite all wars and cataclysms. Graf asked us to confront our unconsciously established certainties regarding the continuity of our species, which is very much in question today, and showed the power of propaganda inherent in discourses reassuring us of those certainties, whether they primarily involve history, as here, or, by extension, science or politics.

—Younes Vam Parys

Translated from French by Molly Savaris.

MILAN

Maurizio Cattelan
PIAZZA DEGLI AFFARI/PALAZZO REALE

Maurizio Cattelan first appeared on the scene around 1990 with nearly imperceptible performance actions that manifested a fear of failure and an intolerance of every constructive system. In recent years, however, he has occupied increasingly visible terrain. Galleries and magazines—and also outdoor spaces—are among the arenas where Cattelan strikes to the heart of those "things" he often states he wants to touch upon: death, abandonment, forgetfulness, a sense of inadequacy or guilt, and a fascination with power and its refusal. These themes returned in this exhibition in Milan, organized around four works. *L.O.V.E.*, 2010, stood at the center of Piazza degli Affari, facing the Milan Stock Exchange; it is a sculpture of a hand, thirty-seven feet high, with all the fingers chopped off except the middle one, which points upward. Made from Carrara marble and on a monumental pedestal, it is an image the artist has worked with before, but in this case the context produced another interpretation. Behind the raised finger, the piazza, whose architectural layout dates back to the Fascist era, became a stage for the frustrations and misdeeds of a faceless economic crisis.

Sculpture, which for Cattelan is a linguistic medium, functions in his work as a message that produces contrasting effects. In the Palazzo Reale, a short walk away, he installed three well-known works: *La Nona Ora* (The Ninth Hour), 1999, a sculpture depicting Pope John Paul II struck by a meteorite and collapsed onto a red wall-to-wall carpet; *Untitled*, 2003, a puppet of a drummer boy; and *Untitled*, 2009, which depicts a young woman dressed in white, crucified, with her back to the viewer, in a wooden case. The three works formed a triptych of a modern Holy Family living and dying in the palazzo's Hall of the Caryatids, the only room in the historic government building that survived the 1943 bombing of the city, where the caryatids of the decorative scheme now have broken-off heads.

Maurizio Cattelan, *L.O.V.E.*, 2010, Carrara marble, travertine, 36' 9" x 15' 5" x 15' 5".



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