



STRAHLENDICHTE
2011

TOBIAS GREWE

TOBIAS GREWE IS ONE OF THE HOT NEW ARTISTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE IN THE RHINELAND. THE SELF-TAUGHT PHOTOGRAPHER CREATES ABSTRACT IMAGES WITH THE HELP OF EXTREME PERSPECTIVE, SKILFUL CROPPING AND DELIBERATE OVEREXPOSURE, AND CATEGORICALLY REJECTS THE USE OF ANY POST-PRODUCTION DIGITAL MANIPULATION. MARCEL KRENZ SPOKE WITH THE ARTIST IN HIS HOME AND STUDIO IN COLOGNE.



MARCEL KRENZ 2011 seemed to be your year - with a highly successful solo show in Cologne, a group exhibition in your home-town of Sundern, a new catalogue on your most recent works, and your inclusion in the long-awaited compendium „Rising - Young Artists to Keep an Eye On“ (DAAB Media, Cologne). And in 2012 we will see your works in solo shows in Düsseldorf and Thessaloniki, as well as in a group show at your main gallery Beck & Eggeling new quarters in Düsseldorf. How do you explain your sudden success?

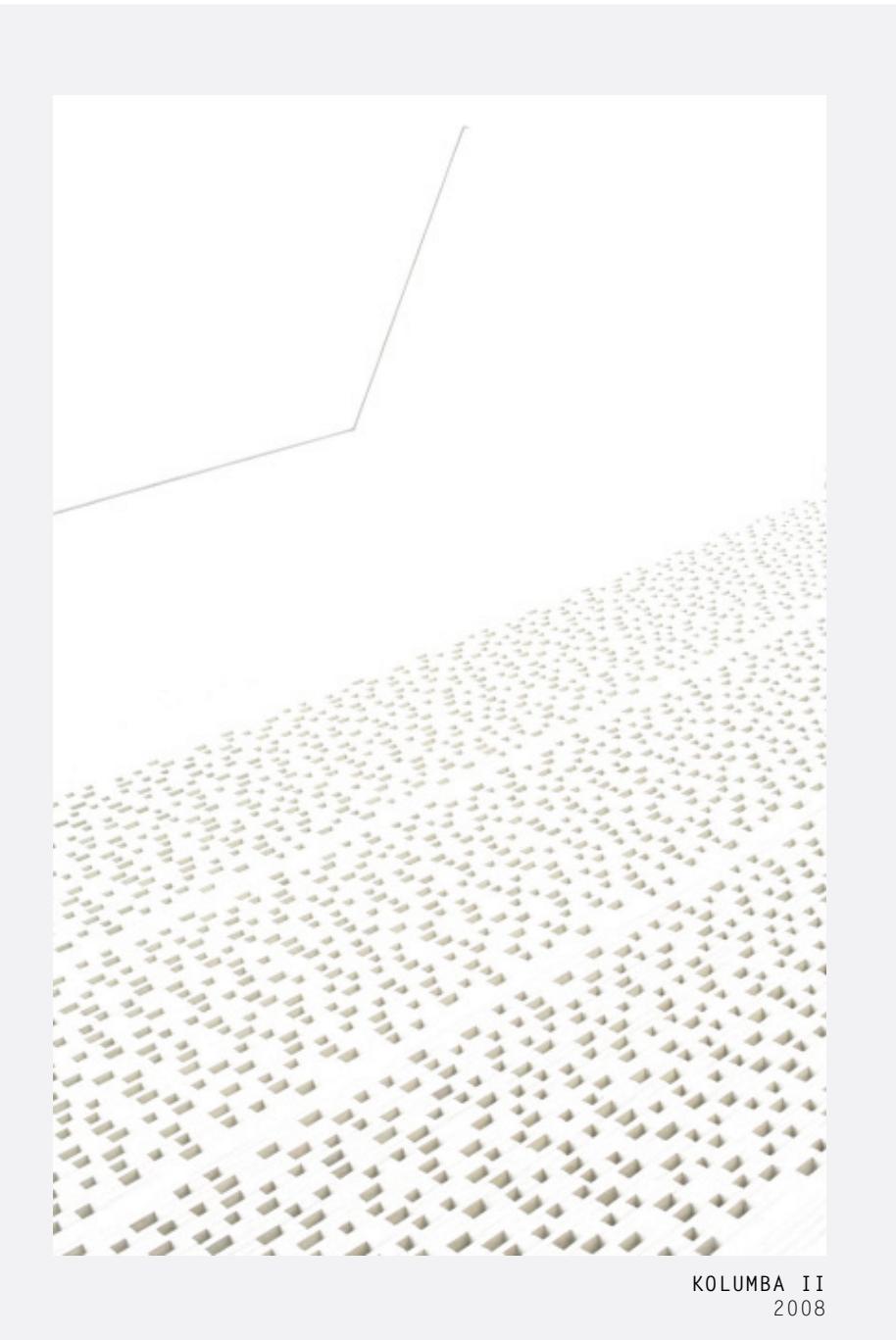
TOBIAS GREWE First of all, no success comes overnight. It's always the result of hard work behind the scenes. But yes, there does seem to be more attention being paid to my work in the last 12-14 months or so. I think part of it has to do with the fact that abstract art in general is gaining more attention these days. In November 2011, I took part in a large group show, "KONSTRUKTIV!", which Gérard Goodrow curated for the gallery Beck & Eggeling new quarters in Düsseldorf. The show focussed on 16 young artists (among others Jan Albers, Frauke Dannert, Shannon Finley, Cathy Jardon, Kai Richter and Frank Thiel) working in the field of geometric abstraction, juxtaposed with as many older artists from the classical modern and post-war era, such as Josef Albers, Heinz Mack, Gerhard Richter and Victor Vasarely. One of my large-format photographs hung together with a group of small works on paper by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. It was a fascinating visual experience for me as well, seeing how the idea of geometric abstraction has progressed over the last hundred years without losing any of its original power. And it was amazing to see the affinities between some of the great masters of the modern age and young contemporary artists. It was quite a challenge for all of us. Soon after, I was chosen by a jury of experts to be included in the "Rising" project, which features the works of 100 young artists from around the world. Here as well, it's amazing to see how many young artists are working in the field of abstraction, be it in painting, sculpture, photography or drawing.

MK Abstract photography is rare, isn't it? We still tend to associate this medium with documentation or at least narration. There always seems to be some kind of story to be told. Your works, on the other hand, are abstract in the truest sense of the word, since they always originate in reality, but break this down to create something completely different. Most of your works are based on architecture, whereby, if I understand correctly, it's not architecture as such that interests you, but rather the forms, colours and compositions you find within this. Is this the reason why you rarely make reference to the architects or the specific buildings in your titles?

TG That's right. I have always been fascinated by architecture, but for my work, nondescript, at first glance boring or even ugly buildings are just as interesting as those designed by top architects such as Norman Foster, Richard Meier, Peter Zumthor or Oscar Niemeyer. One of my favourite motifs is based on a colourful but anonymous apartment building in Miami. I don't know who designed it, but that's not important. The artist's view, my own personal way of seeing, is my most important instrument for unveiling structures that I find in the surfaces, i.e. forms and rhythms or repetitions of elements of the façade. I focus so much on particular details that the rest of the building is more or less unimportant for me. That's why the titles of my works often reveal what I perceived when I saw the building for the very first time, for example "Twisted". "Tumbling" or "Curves".



ARP
2008



MK You didn't attend an art academy and came relatively late to photography. In fact, you have another career in a completely different field. How do you juggle both careers?

TG I don't see photography as a second career - it's more like a calling. My "other life", as I like to call it, revolves around consulting and marketing strategies. My clients are among the global players on the DAX 30.

MK In marketing and advertising, everything is retouched to make it look “perfect”. And your pictures often look as though they have been digitally manipulated and colour-enhanced. In many cases, it's hard to believe that they haven't been “photoshopped”. What are your tricks?

TG The trick is that there is no trick. What you see is what I shot. For my own art, I completely and utterly reject all the fancy tools used in marketing, especially post-production digital reotouching to create an “ideal” image. My creative tools are all used during the actual act of shooting the photo on site. Cropping, aperture and shutter speed are the main creative instruments I use to distort or abstract the image. Nothing happens afterwards in the lab or on the computer. It sounds easy, and it actually is! It's truly amazing when you think about all the things you can do with light!

MK But don't these two worlds - career and calling - get in the way of each other some times? How do you find the balance?

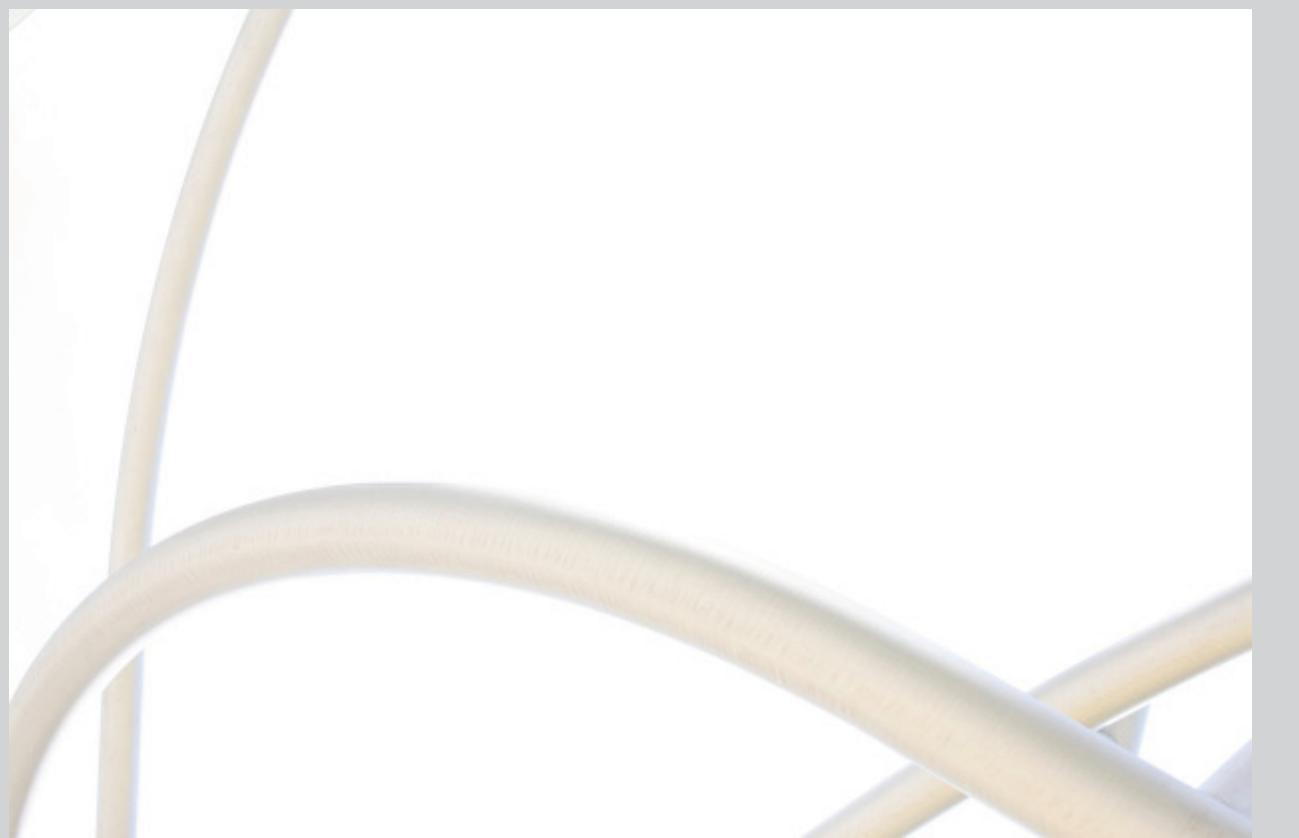
TG There's no conflict at all. In fact, they complement each other. On the one hand, I guess I kind of need the pressure and the stress. This helps me to be creative and develop new ideas. And on the other hand, my career enables numerous art projects since it allows me, for example, to travel to other continents, where I find inspiration and new motifs. And, at the end of the day, the fact that I have another source of income means that my art can be free of financial stress, since I earn my money elsewhere. The art thus remains financially independent, which is a great luxury for any artist.



ATOMIUM
2009



BRASIL I
2010



CURVES I
2010

MK Let's get back to the art world. Your works have a certain affinity to the so-called Helsinki School. Were these artists an influence or role model for you?

TG: Sure, of course! But in retrospect, since I only discovered them for myself later. It was like finding friends who speak the same language. Last spring, during the Gallery Weekend in Berlin, I met Timothy Persons, the founder of the Helsinki School, at an exhibition opening. We understood each other immediately. There is, of course, a certain overlapping of thoughts and ideas between my art and the art of the Helsinki School, but I must say that my own visual language, with my own Tobias Grewe nuances, is very important to me. One important difference is that my work is 99% unplanned. It comes from a gut feeling I have when I confront a specific situation. This determines whether I unpack my equipment or not when I suddenly discover a motif. This authenticity and intuition is extremely important to me and is an essential part of my work.

MK I recall a story you told one time about driving to Brussels to re-shoot a motif you thought you lost. It didn't work out, but in the process you discovered something quite different and exciting...

TG Exactly! Luckily I found the original data file for the work I thought I lost. But I drove to Brussels to shoot the image again. The plan didn't work though, since the combination of weather, the time of day, the season and the intensity of the light made it impossible to recreate the image in the same way. It made me realise for myself how important the authenticity of the precise moment really is. It's not something you can simply recreate or even simulate. Anyway, disappointed that I couldn't redo the image, I drove off and headed back home. On the way, I drove past the back entrance to an amusement park. I drove past, but saw out of the corner of my eye a complex tangle of colourful lines. What was it? I made a full break and drove back in reverse and finally shot the picture from within the car with the motor running. It was a bunch of colourful water slides - twisting and turning around each other - an amazing complexity of lines, forms and colours. The feeling of utter joy and satisfaction I experience in such moments of intuitive discovery and "getting the shot" is indescribable!



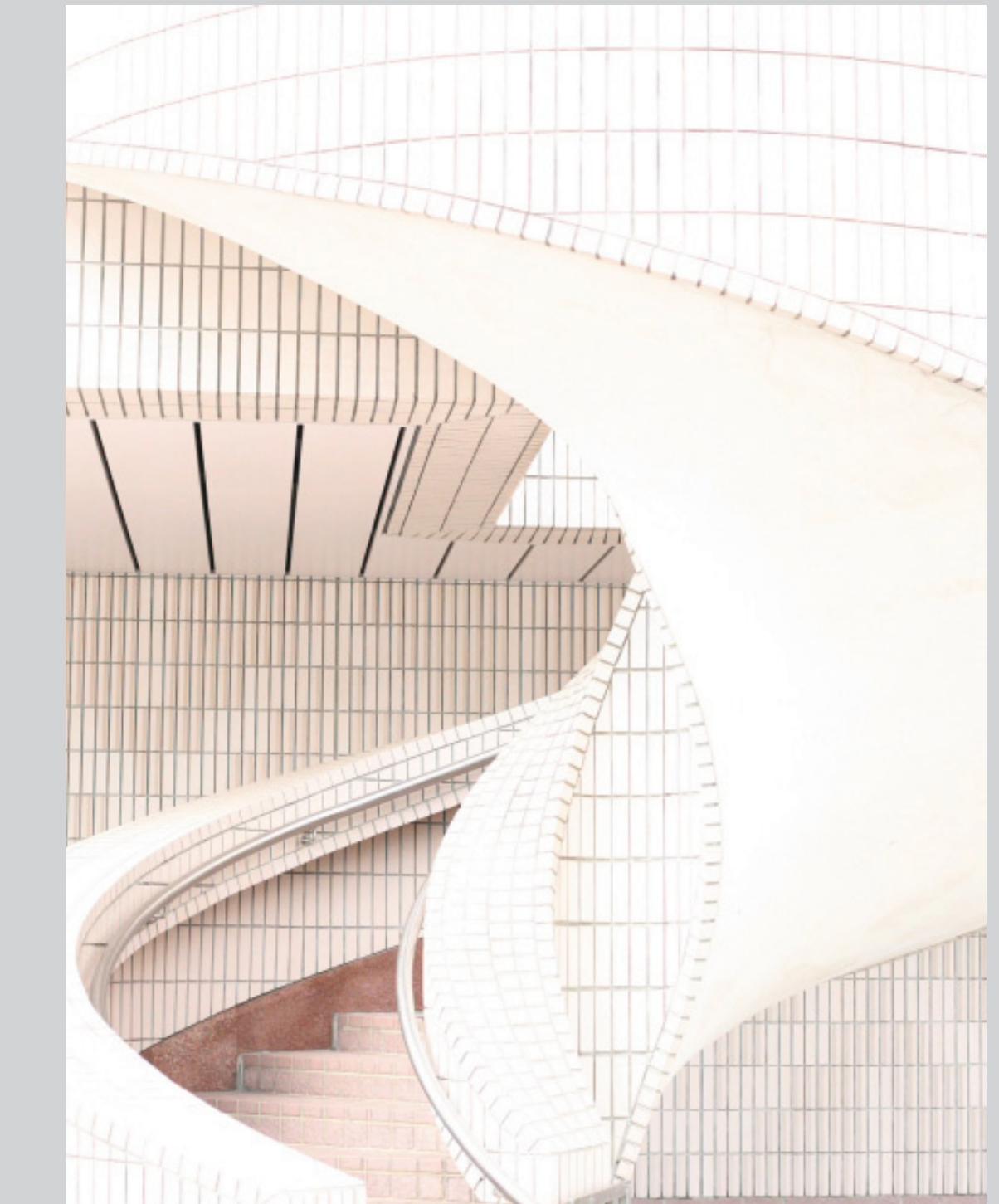
HONGKONG ISLAND III
2010



TWISTED
2010

MK The way you describe it, it's as though the works create themselves, so to speak, as though the motifs were just waiting for you to reveal them. It reminds me of Picasso's famous statement: "I don't search, I find". Nevertheless, you have your own style, which you have carefully developed over the last few years. You even have a kind of trademark style. For a while, you made only white pictures, which are very closely related to one another. They almost look like drawings. And now, since about a year, colour is appearing more and more in your works. Overexposure is taking a back seat. Is this the beginning of a new series, a new Tobias Grewé?

TG Not really. Colour has always been an important theme in my works and is actually at the core of my "White Light" series, i.e. taking colour away. And many works with colour emerged parallel to the white works. I think it would be too self-restrictive to limit myself dogmatically to overexposure - or colour for that matter. In any event, right now, colour seems to be appearing more and more in my works, but that doesn't mean that the "White Light" series is complete or passé. And in the new colour works, some are slightly overexposed to make the colour somewhat softer or to bring out certain nuances in tone. Complete overexposure means that, in many cases, no colour information remains in the image file, which works in some cases, but certainly not all. It really depends on the motif. The motif determines how much light I need to bring in to get a "picture" out of it, which I see in that very moment. In Hong Kong, for example, I shot a detail of a building by Norman Foster. Overexposure would have only made the image diffuse or "milky". As a result, I focused my attention more on cropping, perspective and the subtle reflections of the cloudy sky in the mirror-like façade to achieve the level of abstraction I was going for.



SPINDLE
2010



COLOR FIELDS #1
2011

MK And what's next? Where will your motifs take you now?

TG Since the summer I have been fascinated by the possibility of transforming three-dimensional architectural structures into fields of pure, two-dimensional colour. The end results are in many ways similar to the abstract colourfield painting that was popular among especially American artists such as Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell or Mark Rothko during the 1940s and '50s. My new works from this series are thus characterized more than anything else by large fields of flat, solid colour spread across the surface of the photograph, resulting in an extremely flat picture plane. The composition is no longer determined by perspective angles and the dynamics of lines, but rather by an overall sense of pure, almost meditative space. Colour is no longer merely a means to an end, but rather becomes the subject of the photo in itself.

For an exhibition planned for this May in the project space Raum Oberkassel in Düsseldorf, I want to take the possibilities of photography one step further. Based on the colourfields series, I plan to bring the two-dimensional "interpretation" of the three-dimensional starting point of my images back into play. It's kind of like the children's game of Chinese whispers, whereby an original statement is altered each time it is passed onto the next player. In my case, the monumental, coloured concrete ventilation stacks of an underground car park are transformed into flat, glossy coloured surfaces that are reminiscent of abstract painting, which in turn are brought back into the third-dimension, whereby the large spatial object that results has little to do with the original ventilation stacks. It's all about testing borders to see what photography can do or become. I was always fascinated by the transformational powers of photography, but these new works - both the "Colourfields" and the "Chinese Whispers" - have so much power that it truly baffles me! I can't wait to see how the audience reacts!



TOBIAS GREWE (b. 1975 in Arnsberg/Westfalen) is represented by Beck & Eggeling new quarters in Düsseldorf and Donopoulos International Fine Art in Thessaloniki.

His next solo exhibitions take place in May 2012 at Raum Oberkassel in Düsseldorf and Donopoulos International Fine Art in Thessaloniki. His work can also be seen in the group show "Alles nur Fassade? Architektur als Abstraktion" in March/April 2012 at Beck & Eggeling new quarters in Düsseldorf. Photo: Michael Güth

MARCEL KRENZ is a Cologne-based, freelance author on contemporary art and architecture and has written for numerous institutions and publications in Germany and abroad, including *Wallpaper**, *Frame*, *Blueprint*, *Architektur & Wohnen*, *ArtReview*, *Stylepark* and *Flash Art*.



COLOR FIELDS #2
2011