

TOBIAS GREWE

TOBIAS GREWE | STRUCTURES

Cubes, squares, rectangles, triangles, rhombuses, circles, cylinders. Or simply lines – single lines that lead nowhere or multiple lines that form grids or outline geometric forms in non-definable space. Planes, monochrome surfaces, fields of color or wide expanses of pure white. Extreme perspectives and even more extreme light situations reveal, define and in some cases deconstruct a seemingly endless repertoire of structures. Structures, uncovered in the mundane architecture of the late 20th century, abstracted by the artist by means of light, detail and perspective.

During the last two years, Tobias Grewe has worked intensively with overexposures and extreme light situations in order to reveal these structures in his photographs. In some cases, he goes so far that the results are enigmatic, nearly monochrome pictures within which the non-color white dominates. Only the most vital pictorial information remains visible. The viewer is seduced to delve deeper into the photograph and tempted to decipher the inner logic of its composition.

In one group of works, for example, various perspectives of the facade of the Kolumba Museum in Cologne dissolve into completely abstract, constructivist compositions with dynamic white rectangles or checkered patterns inspired by Kasimir Malevich. In a related series, the white, corrugated curves of the municipal theater in Düsseldorf are transformed into swerving flat forms in front of the deep blue, equally monochrome background of the crystal clear sky. A glass office building in Hanover becomes an upside down, crystalline staircase, while the colorful balconies of an apartment building in Miami seem to tumble to the ground like a set of children's building blocks.

In these pictorial experiments, we are dealing less with conventional, documentary architectural photography than with an artistic analysis of the interaction of form, color and light. The result can be described as photographic formalism or constructivism. Although architecture does indeed play a significant role in Grewe's oeuvre, it is not so much the buildings themselves that play the central role.

Instead, the carefully selected details of the buildings' facades, as well as the lighting and the in many cases extreme perspectives become tools for the artist with which he transforms the architectural surfaces into abstract forms and compositions. This is what lends the photographs their unique effect. Through extreme perspectives, overexposures and carefully selected details, the architectural elements are torn out of their original context and raised into new, unexpected levels of meaning. What the viewer sees is not necessarily what is actually there, but rather what Tobias Grewe allows us to see.

Grewe's photographs remain authentic in the sense that the artist categorically rejects any kind of digital manipulation or corrections of his images through Photoshop or related image editing software. Instead, he relies solely on classical photographic techniques and the multifarious possibilities of creating images through the skilled application of lenses and apertures to determine and achieve the image cut and coloration in the very moment that the photograph is being shot on site.

His trained eye for and perception of the special structures that surround him can be seen as a kind of corrective in itself – an artistic attempt to create a certain order out of the dissonance of the post-industrial metropolis. In his photographs, Tobias Grewe reveals the inner structures – that is to say the balance and logic – of the city architecture of the late 20th century. It is thus no coincidence that the geometric compositions of the Russian Constructivists and the clear, reduced formal language of the Bauhaus masters are significant starting points for Grewe's own compositional experiments. In both cases, we are dealing with an attempt at a new ordering of society, which follows the harmonious logic of geometry and color theory. Through Tobias Grewe's „Structures“, we as viewers see the world with new eyes and begin to pay attention to the smallest details within our environment. And, by doing so, we discover that in every disorder, in every situation that at first glance may appear banal, there is in fact a certain special order to be found – but only then, when we are willing to take the time to see it.

Gérard A. Goodrow