

GALERIE CRÈVECOEUR
4 RUE JOUYE-ROUVE
75020 PARIS

Erica Baum
The Public Imagination
September 13 - November 2 2013

Erica Baum has already presented an exhibition entitled *The Public Imagination* in Lausanne's Circuit Art Centre (2011). The artist's first solo exhibition at Crèvecoeur is conceived as the next chapter in an incomplete atlas, which will see the emergence of further chapters in the course of 2014. The term atlas is not without significance, as Erica Baum's exhibitions are displayed in the manner of an orderly collection of maps, reproducing a given space whilst questioning the set of reference and information systems that govern our representation of things, following observation of them.

'Sightings' is the title of a book she published with Onestarpres in 2010, which probably launched this working process. The book juxtaposes images and fragments of accounts by anonymous people describing their own sightings of UFOs. The images come from several of Baum's photographic series. A portion of them titled *Newspaper Clippings* frames selections of clippings from the New York Times, which appear randomly positioned close together. Others are works from the *Naked Eye* series, which involved photographing the edges of paperback books shot from the side (also called gutters) whilst being leafed through revealing glimpses of text and image fragments within this vertical frame. Finally, a certain number of more abstract images are featured; reproductions of found images of cloudy skies, in addition to Baum's own photographs of shadows projected onto urban landscapes.

On page 28 of this book, there is a photograph from the *Newspaper Clippings* series showing several aligned clippings. Only one of them, roughly in the centre of the image, discloses a legible sentence: "captured the public imagination". This sentence fragment is the source of the exhibition's title. The sentence is cut, hence the subject and instigator of this "capture" remains unidentified.

On the next page, it says:

"A large elliptical object trailing
a streak of violet light about one third
its dimension came straight down
out of the sky, struck the hedges
and bounced straight up again
out of sight"

The Public Imagination, according to Baum, is, above all, a series of observations: hers, of course, but they are based, as they are here, on those of other anonymous observers, her contemporaries, eyewitnesses just like the artist herself, thereby creating a potential public imagination. Depending on the circumstances, this may be apprehended as a universal testimony, or as a collective hallucination, pitched midway between wisdom and crowd hysteria (1). Regardless of knowing the sources and whether they are true or not, what matters is the experimental appropriation, the "capture" that Baum operates in her photographic re-framings (image and text fragments within the image), and which places the emphasis on the ubiquitous appearance of the signs that compose our visual environment: a reflection on a way an epoch examines, to the extent of what remains unexplained therein.

Several series by Baum, dating from different periods, are presented simultaneously at Crèvecoeur. The works are juxtaposed in an exhibition hang that operates like a narrative thread, appearing like so many irrational clues in this work conducted by Baum over many years dedicated to the investigation and interpretation of the signs around us. The works on show are selected from *Newspaper Clippings* (2010-2013), *Naked Eye* (2012-2013), and a series of posters comprising found images of birds, urban landscapes, shadows and skies (2013). Lastly, the exhibition includes images from the earliest series, *Frick* (1998), which arose from Baum's observation of New York's Frick Collection library records, where the works were referenced by title, date and author, but also by a number of keywords designed to describe them. Baum, by isolating one or a few of these words, composed an object in a new language, such as "squirrels, flying", which becomes a formula having more to do with a prophecy than with the rational description of a work from the past.

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Citing her influences, Baum evokes Brassai, Atget or Evans, pioneers of the photography of urban landscapes and street scenes where text fragments emerge: a jumble of shop signs, advertising posters, placards, political messages etc. It is said of the photography by Walker Evans that he captured the essence of '30s America. In his photograph titled *Roadside Gas Station* (1929), more than one text is superimposed; the original sign, a half-torn poster and letters sprayed on by an anonymous hand, thus creating a "random" phrase... It can be deciphered and read as something like: "Any Old Gas A Change the Reference". Following on from Evans, Baum likewise isolates, starting from printed objects, what Gross names semantic ready-mades (2). This work on language is particularly eloquent at this point in time, as in the words of Goldsmith (3), "by spotlighting the way language describes information systems in analog media Baum makes us aware of how that same language is used in computing". *The Public Imagination*, according to Baum, is also a way to once more raise the question of the relevance of our data systems, and the gaps they leave open with regard to our belief systems.

Erica Baum personal exhibitions have been presented, among others, at Bureau, New York (2011, 2012), Kunstverein Langenhagen (2013), Melas Padopoulos, Athens (2013), Sao Paulo Biennale (2012), Circuit, Lausanne (2011) and LuttgenMeijer, Berlin (2009). Her work has been featured in numerous group shows such as *Everyday Epiphanies: Photography and Daily Life since 1969*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013), *The Feverish Library Cont'd* at Capitan Petzel Gallery, Berlin (2013), *Coquilles Mécaniques*, FRAC Alsace (2012) and *Journal d'une chambre*, Crèvecoeur (2012). Her work has been acquired by prestigious institutional collections such as The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

(1) 'The Crowd Wisdom' is a 2004 book by James Surowiecki. Its title is an allusion to 'The Crowd Madness' by Charles Mackay, published in 1841.

(2) Béatrice Gross, "Erica Baum's "wild tumult, (...), of uncertainty," Or "series of ellipses, hung on around, (...), very subtle in escaping..." , in Erica Baum, "Dog Ear", Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011, Brooklyn, NY

(3) Kenneth Goldsmith, "Wish Me Well and I'll Love You Still: The Dog Ears of Erica Baum", in Erica Baum, "Dog Ear", Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011, Brooklyn, NY