

Raul Walch Exhibition
NOTOPIA
Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig
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A mobile gives pleasure, is delicate and poetic, and conveys lightness and balance. Even a slight draft sets it gently in motion. The composition of forms in space constantly changes. On a formal level, Raul Walch's constellations hanging in the large White Cube of the exhibition room take up the idea of the mobile as the free play of abstract forms in space. As kinetic sculpture, mobiles trace back to Alexander Calder and abstract Modern Art. But with the materials he uses, Raul Walch's work already clearly distances itself from that modernist understanding of art that, completely focused on itself, denies all relationship to the world. Here, the artist has assembled his work with the surfaces and forms of fabric. Particularly standing out is the color of those elements consisting of jeans material and presenting its characteristic indigo blue. Along with and in contrast to the robust and natural cotton material are metallic-scintillating textiles of ultra-modern, synthetic fiber-composite textiles.

The narrative of these works unfolds literally with the material. What speaks here are the story and symbolism of the material. Denim and the jeans produced from it carry a broad historical spectrum of possible associations: as the robust, riveted pants of laborers in the United States, but also as a symbol of the youth protest culture and in general of the free West during the 20th century's time of opposing Cold War blocs, and finally today as an omnipresent, mass-produced article of clothing of a global throw-away culture of consumption. In contrast, futuristic-seeming basalt, glass, and carbon fiber fabrics stand for modeling streamlined structures and the technological promises of today and tomorrow.

The specific material focus connects the presented works. Denim is the bearing material and at the same time the pictorial ground of the large-format prints and textile works, which take up the abstract use of lines in swooping motions and thereby correspond with the mobiles. Part of the inspiration for this was the structures of the fabric and the characteristic decorative stitching of the pants pockets. The costumes, solidified as sculptures, are created from the two kinds of materials. As coverings and ghostly shapes, the group of five remains enigmatic. Its pathos-brimming pose reminiscent of fantasy characters and superheroes appears as an ironic rupture of the otherwise dominant atmosphere of elegance and reduction.

What follows is a symbolic descent into the catacombs of the unconscious and the repressed. In the lower storey, the artist shows the video work *Squatting the Ruins of Utopia*. In the video, we again encounter five cloaked figures. The futuristic-fantastic symbol-bearers take us to inhospitable sites: the destroyed landscape of a forest burned to charcoal; the architectural non-site of a bloodless office building ensemble in rasterized crenelated architecture; a soulless, artificial tropical paradise; and the towering material mountains of a recycling center. These are the sites of an imagined dystopian future. But these sites are already among us. Raul Walch and his team shot the video in Berlin, Brandenburg, and Sachsen-Anhalt. A fifth sequence shows the ruins of the Coliseum in Rome and acts as a commentary on the others: are we already looking at the ruins of our civilization? Was modernity itself merely a utopia?

The loop of the video begins and ends with a flight of starlings. While the flight of birds symbolically points to the politically extremely conflictual topic of migration,

the waving, organic motion of the swarm in the room has overpowering beauty. This interweaving of the highly symbolic materiality of a dark reality, on the one hand, and the formal abstraction of waving linear and simultaneously floating, light motions, on the other hand, is the characteristic trait of the exhibition's various works and brings them together as a web.

Text by Sandra Beate Reimann