

GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN

JOHN STEZAKER

She

February 22 – March 30, 2019

Galerie Capitain is pleased to announce the exhibition *She* with new works by the British artist John Stezaker (* 1949 in Worcester, England).

Since the 1970s, found images have been the source material for John Stezaker's work. His collages and image fragments are composed of film stills, antiquarian portrait photographs of actors, or old postcards. Through minimal interventions such as combining two images, altering the image or reversing, Stezaker lends the images that refer to a bygone era and lost their original readability, a new autonomy and meaning.

Stezaker's image fascination is based on film images of the 1940s and especially on black and white images of B-movies. His historical archive consists largely of this repertoire. The new body of work represents John Stezaker's first return to full-color collages since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Stezaker's fascination for the black-and-white imagery is based on the idea that these images belong to a world where the artist, born in 1949, was absent. For Stezaker, color has therefore always portrayed a slightly threatening feeling of presence in the image and not of absence as a source of uncanny fascination. Color seemed both dangerous and enticing.

The new full-color collages are composed of cutouts of silhouettes of almost exclusively female characters combined with film stills. The collages consist of two superimposed images. The lower motif is a film still turned from a landscape to portrait format. Above, Stezaker positions a smaller-sized portrait of an actress whose silhouette is cut out. Stezaker uses the same portraits several times and combines them with different film scenes. These are no longer immediately deciphered by the rotation of the motif but are perceived as abstract ornaments, patterns or forms that inscribe themselves in the cut-out silhouette of the portrait lying above, subordinate themselves to it, but at the same time determine it. The same female silhouette gets a lovely, grotesque, funny, brutal or eerie character depending on the background and the shapes that fill the gap. Likewise, the background layer and the positioning of the silhouette determines whether the overall motif is more figurative, abstract or surrealistic. Layering makes things visible or invisible. Stezaker creates new, self-contained worlds of images that sometimes seem abstract, sometimes narrative, through the combination of two images, which originally have no logical connection and are forgotten in the course of time.

For the first time, Stezaker worked in the *Dark Star* series from 1979 and in the following *Recto-Verso* series from 1980 with silhouette cutouts. The silhouettes of the last 15 years were mainly male figures, which are deposited with black cardboard. The change from monochrome to color in Stezaker's work also means a shift in gender focus. The focus of the new work is the female character, *She*, who was referred to by the Hollywood advertising machine of the 1950s as a "canvas goddess". This universal, mythical figure has become the central motif of the new group of works. The collages, which modulate the contours of this female figure in various variations, suggest diverse types of metamorphoses that represented this intermediate figure - half human half goddess.

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The exhibition will be supplemented with the film *She*, 2018, presented in the Albertusstrasse. The film consists of hundreds of black and white portraits of actresses projecting at 24 frames per second in rapid succession on the wall. We are not able to see the individual images, which are not connected to each other like in a conventional film, at this speed. As with his collages, Stezaker also creates new imagery and levels of meaning in his films with existing images, questions and shakes our viewing habits and underlines the importance of seeing.