

LOTTE DINSE

Securing the Evidence

In her photographic work, Spanish artist Rosell Meseguer repeatedly deals with the transformation of places and architectures shaped by history, which have lost their original function during the social, political and technological developments since the mid 20th century. On elaborate research trips, Meseguer visits former bunkers, military fortifications on the coast, closed-down mines, coal pits and whale hunting stations in order to document such abandoned scenarios. Meseguer always supplements her photographic series with found, anonymous historical images so that a reference, a dialogue evolves between the ages. The techniques that Meseguer employs – in addition to digital photography – include numerous historical photographic processes such as calotype (brown printing), cyanotype (blue printing), and rubber printing. The noticeably long periods of time over which the artist realises her individual projects give some indication of the methodical approach employed. Considerable collections of material are made in the case of many works, which reflects the artist's extremely time-consuming research, documenting and arranging activity. Her scientific-artistic gathering and securing of clues serves a reconstruction of collectively remembered historical events and conditions as well as their individual recounting and repetition.

The installation shown in the exhibition, *OVNI Archive* (2007-2010), deals with the topic of espionage and the associated information politics during the two world wars, the Cold War, and up to the present day. Almost all nations made use of espionage by secret and information services, satellites, planes and submarines etc. in order to gather military and technical information about other states and use this information for their own defence or wartime strategies. In *OVNI Archive* Meseguer has designed an extensive archive that collects together heterogeneous material on the subject, such as her own and others' photographs, drawings, articles from newspapers and the Internet, books, and found objects and documents from other archives. In this way Meseguer questions secret-service systems and their power mechanisms with respect to the administration of the data and documents obtained, which are not available to the public due to strict secrecy on the part of governments and major business concerns.

The photographs produced by Meseguer include shots of former bunkers and coastline ordnance close to Guanabara Bay, Brazil, which was involved in submarine battles in both world wars, as well as of the Peral submarine exhibited in the naval port in Cartagena, Spain. In this way, Meseguer creates a subtle dialogue between the powers in the Mediterranean area and those in the South American Atlantic region influenced by Europe; hereby, she visualises their military inventions as well as current developments.

Beyond this, the material presented in the display cases and on the walls examines various socio-political conditions and problems in connection with the implementation of the capitalist social system at the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the title of the installation refers to the bunker's UFO-like form; on the other hand, it stands for our missing knowledge about the information acquired by espionage and now kept

locked away.

Archives are generally regarded as a metaphor of cultural memory, indeed of any way of storing knowledge. In addition, however, they function as places for the production of knowledge, as history is not only stored in but also re-told or told in different ways in them. Consequently, on the one hand the archive can be understood as an institution, whereas on the other hand it is seen as a method. Meseguer refers to both with *OVNI Archive* – by transferring the results of her archiving practice into the exhibition space in the form of an accessible, publicly available archive. A symbolic process of disempowerment takes place here, since the visibility of the documents and data undermines the actual function of documented state secrets. At the same time, the installation functions as a visual metaphor of the transience of political power constellations. The history that is told with the exhibited photographs, documents, texts and acquired images makes no claim to historical accuracy or completeness. Instead, *OVNI Archive* can be understood as an individual attempt to order the past with the aid of the media, knowledge stores and transmission methods available to us today.

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