

joachim koester

If One Thing Moves Everything Moves

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When we speak of something as 'occult' we might refer to the supernatural, the mysterious, the darkly magical; but at the same time the word can refer to the concealed, the clandestine, the hidden. Where the different usages converge is in that they all refer to something not missing but rather blocked from view (which indeed is the literal meaning of the word's Latin root), something not so much obscure as obscured, not so much dark as undisclosed; they also converge in the work of Joachim Koester in the exhibition *When One Thing Moves Everything Moves* currently on view at the Elba Benítez Gallery.

Koester (Copenhagen, 1962) alerts us to this dual role of the occult in his work when he describes it as a kind of "ghost-hunting," saying that it points to "the twilight zone of what can be told and what cannot be told." In his practice -- which is based in photography but also incorporates film, installation and texts -- he often draws on the subject-matter of historical events in order to investigate the less tidy, non-linear narratives that underlie and undermine them. In the process he seeks the blind spots in collective imagery, the points of suspension in official discourse, the ambiguous intermediate zones between fact and fiction, truth and not-quite-truth, the banal and the uncanny.

For instance, in this exhibition Koester's black-and-white film entitled *To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness (movements generated from the magical passes of Carlos Castaneda)* (2009) presents a mime performing a sequence of movements, or 'magical passes,' ostensibly designed to heighten the consciousness of the person executing them. The filmed movements derive from the pseudo-anthropological writings of Carlos Castaneda, who claimed to have learned them from Don Juan Osorio, a Mexican shaman -- but in fact Don Juan may have not have existed at all, having possibly been a fictional literary personage of Castaneda's devising. Thus the short film is intersected by multiple ambiguities: between word and image, between instruction and execution, between study and storytelling, between types of cognition and types of consciousness.

Consciousness (as well as its alteration) is likewise an underlying or occult motif in *From the Secret Garden of Sleep* (2008), a series of seven close-up photographs of leafy cannabis plants that in their quasi-expressionist intensity and detail seem self-consciously inscribed within the history of photography. As Koester writes in the text accompanying the photographs (Koester's texts form an important element of his practice), these heavily hybridized plants, as a rich source of psychoactive components, form a lush bridge between the world of matter and consciousness.

Although the five photos in *Some Boarded Up Houses* clearly reference the straightforward and ostensibly objective photographic typology developed by Bernd and Hilla Becher, they too contain references to the occult -- for these are haunted houses, haunted by sad specters of failure and ruin. The current global financial network has become so elusive and opaque in its deregulated machinations that it is in effect invisible to the most laypeople: yet these boarded-up houses are the all-too-visible outcroppings of the fissures and fractures besetting that same system in the current economic crisis.

Finally, the photographs of *Barker Ranch* (2008) comprise another small but intrinsically layered study of history's hidden intersections of fact and fantasy. The photographs depict the ranch in Death Valley where the murderous, self-dramatizing Manson Family once lived, quite literally in hiding. The violence of the Manson family, the violence underlying so much US history, the violence typical of Hollywood Westerns and the violence that plagued the late 1960's converge in the rather hermetic symbol of a simple, ramshackle home.

Joachim Koester (Copenhagen, 1962) has had individual exhibitions at the Museo Tamayo (Mexico City), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Palais de Tokyo (Paris) and the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica (Barcelona). He has participated in the Venice Biennale, Documenta X, the Tate Triennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale as well as in numerous group exhibitions around the world. His work forms part of permanent collections at museums such as MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Denmark. This is his first solo show in Spain.

George Stolz