

MIRJAM DRÖGE



The Need to Hold Still

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I feel fortunate for this opportunity to present the work of Mirjam Dröge. I met Mirjam a few years ago while I was living in Germany. We were both affiliated with a photography class at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig, and we decided to trade German/English language lessons. These exchanges happened in walks around Leipzig, during photo sessions in the school's lighting studio, and over meals cooked in our respective homes. At some point in one of these early meetings, Mirjam shared her artwork with me. Looking at her images, I realized that it was her *Baumhaus* (Tree house) photograph that was installed in an office building near my apartment. I had been walking by and thinking about that photograph for weeks.

I share this anecdote because the way that I stumbled upon Mirjam's *Baumhaus* in the course of my daily routine seems relevant to how she works as an artist. She moves with a heightened awareness to her surroundings and an openness to stumbling upon the unexpected. The sense of introspective reverence Mirjam has for the subjects and places she photographs is passed on to the people who later stand in front of her pieces. Her photos encourage reflection and slow observation.

The Need to Hold Still includes landscapes, self-portraits, and still-lives made by the artist over the past five years. Though the photographic styles vary, the work is united by Mirjam's interest in physical and psychological spaces of refuge, memory, and child-like reverie.

Baumhaus, Leipzig I/II and *Eppingen I/II* reveal clandestine tree houses constructed by kids in various German cities. The artist does not trespass on these sacred spaces. She depicts the structures in a straight-forward manner, leaving us to wonder what happens behind the boarded walls and to recall secret constructions of our own.



There are two photographs that present the artist lost in her own thoughts. In *am Teich* (at the pond), she sits in the comfort of a white robe at the edge of a stone pond, gazing down into the murky water. In *ohne Titel* (untitled) she stands in white long johns against a gray backdrop, clenching the right side of her body. Both photos contain lines or surfaces that function as metaphoric thresholds that have either just been crossed, or have the potential to be.



In the series *...von der Abwesenheit (...of the absence)*, the artist photographed various rooms in the home of her deceased grandparents. Intervening with yellow tape, she made outlines of objects that she associated with them—objects that were removed or given away after their passing. These appear to be innocuous domestic scenes, but once we notice the forensic-looking tape lines, a more uncanny space is activated. These ghostly traces are reminders of how palpable absence can be, and how memory and value is attached to even the most banal objects.

Another grandparent is remembered in *das Leben meiner Großmutter nach '45 (the life of my grandmother after '45)*. Here, a mauve wallet/case is packed full of photographs that we only see slivers of. We are left to imagine what might appear in these photos, the memories that they attempt to preserve, and the life of her grandmother both before and after 1945.

Boundaries—emotional and physical—are emphasized throughout Mirjam's work. The photographs are about what we are visually offered, but they are also about what we can't access. There is curiosity triggered by what we can't see and solace in the fact that certain spaces and thoughts remain private. In moving through this exhibition, we could imagine Mirjam taking us on a walk—leading us in and out of actual and metaphoric spaces. She pauses with us here and there, but ultimately leaves us alone to sense it all.

Kristine Thompson
Assistant Curator, UCR/CMP

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