

# M+B

## MARTIN DENKER

**“Goooooogleescapes . . .”**

**Dr. Franz-Xaver Schlegel, 2006**

*translated from German*

With fantastic abstracts out of the impressions of reality that the rich store of the Age of the Image provides, Martin Denker has established his niche between photography and visual art. Not by chance, he describes his own working approach as ‘painting with pixels’, and the outcome as ‘non-linear collages’. Intuitive compilations and processing of realities into new, bizarre pictorial realms lend their stamp to the artistic intuition, the technical processing and the expression of his large-scale works. An encounter with Denker’s entirely consistent, combined application of construction and abstraction is an encounter with new universes. They encompass both the visible world of the everyday environment and within it, the ostensibly ‘objective’ media experience, and the non-visible but present and within that, the spheres of reality awaiting artificial synthesis. Linked to this is a complex technical and artistic procedure that draws its visual power from surreal-abstract pictorial dramatics; it comes hand in hand with the hypertense refraction of structures of form and content alike, of quotes, borrowings and symbols along their interpretations.

Martin Denker was born in Hamburg in 1976. From 1996 on, he studied fine art at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität in Greifswald. He transferred to painting and photography at the University of Texas in San Antonio/USA, and in 2001, moved again to become a student of Thomas Ruff’s at the Academy in Düsseldorf. In 2002, he rose to become Andreas Gursky’s assistant; in 2006, he received the Meisterschüler honour from Thomas Ruff. Already represented in a line of German and international photographic collections, the rising artist has swum entirely free of the oeuvre of the two protagonists of photographic art in Düsseldorf and has defined his own artistic position in that art.

Planning the content and expression of his pieces is preceded by intense engagement with the images awaiting Denker’s processing. The method can be compared to the finding and sorting of the flotsam and jetsam borne in the stories and histories of things, situations and people. Sources of the visual, digital raw material in Martin Denker’s works of photographic art are his own digital shots taken on travels in distant countries; then come downloads from news, comic, trade and pornographic sites that he finds in the expanses of the Internet, and finally, scans of glamour photographs in printed magazines. Other recycled material includes war images from books and journals, cinema stills and even the advertising flyers that daily cram one’s letterbox. Like a kind of ‘digi-jockey’, Denker cuts the selected motifs from their original contexts, samples,

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mixes and puts them together anew. Although no element is left unaltered, the original references are integrated into the new story. The result is an unusual cosmos of images, created by means of some ingenious digital technology, psychedelic in tendency such that for the artist, it has the quality of a 'visual paranoia'.

The piling and fusing of images, often from divergent pictorial spheres, is consistent with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's dictum that the multiple manifold constitutes reality; and it well reflects the situation of the contemporary individual of visual mind-set. Under the permanent demands of these circumstances, lacking an overall panorama and bearings, there is a sense of impending demise in all the visual overkill. Chasms open on the margins of the familiar all too often. Images, the more so given that they occur en masse through the media and are potentially open to manipulation, are phantasms that have long lost their function of aiding elucidation and comprehension. One needs only to transfer Peter Handke's critique of language to the situation pertaining to pictures, for example, to see that they are likewise becoming the inscrutable 'world outside' to which the 'inner world', the ego, is abandoned. Denker opts to take the bull by the horns, playing with the various notions of reality by extending the bounds of validity to encompass the dimensions of the digital and psychological. Which in turn enhances the surreal quality of his iconocosm.

In that context one might also call to mind Artur P. Schmidt's analysis of the term of 'immersion' – in a different reality of experience. Schmidt concludes that 'a total immersion presupposes that all reference to the real world is relinquished. The more perfect the substitute stimuli of the virtual world are, the more an individual is persuaded that everything is real experience and [...] the less she/he will be able to differentiate between being in a submerged or an emerged state.' The manner of depiction is deliberately kept indeterminate, which makes it a simple matter to apply the approach to Denker's pictorial concepts. In a way, we can rediscover in the artist's striving to make visible the many-layered, René Magritte's stance that 'Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see.'

How does Martin Denker proceed? He maintains an aesthetic of semi-transparent, seemingly fragmented planes of superimposed zones, patterns and objects that articulate and subdivide space. From object and spatial structures about to dissolve or re-form, new objects emerge; or again, extant ones cede. It is conspicuous that all the parts of what is in most cases a pictorial organism bursting at the seams with 'photographic' elements and liberal, non-formal gestures, are interlocked and mutually attuned in their aesthetics. That aspect is played out to particularly good effect in the piece entitled *Il Ultimo Paraiso*.

Dialectically speaking, a liaison occurs between pairs of opposites that, little by little, become visible in these phantasy-crammed sets – reality and fiction, continuity and discontinuity, consolidation and dissolution – and construction and destruction. Simultaneously, floating amorphous structures form antitheses to geometric shapes that, where they have the attributes of grids or hatching, call technological sources to mind. In Denker's photographs one thus

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encounters a synthesis of things between which no first glance would find common ground, but which, just as in real life, leave their mark increasingly on the way we perceive our sensory impressions, that is, on a mode of perception geared to interlinking; things which set off new chains of association and, it could be ventured, which create a new internally coherent world: establishing a habitat that could not be more germane to what until then seemed beyond evocation, incompatible or impossible. Motifs enhance their effect reciprocally in their cryptic combination, and especially so where, for example, images of cute comic figures are joined by others from contexts of politics, violence or horror. Permanent agitation and motion mark events self-generated organically. It all seems as if fixed as in a cut through time and points to an unstoppable process of pictorial coming-to-be of elements operating where and how they will.

The variations on the theme of dynamism clearly betray film as a source of inspiration. Consistent with this, the photographs also manifest a tendency toward the abstract. It emerges, for instance, in the fireworks into which, figuratively speaking, the overall composition explodes as in *DerFreischützVomLunarPark* (TheFreeshooterOfLunarPark) and in grid-like conglomerations—observe *GaGaGarten*—which not only at the peripheries, mutate into spatters, bubbles and drops, or, as a recurring feature in many works such as *Dubai-Doobey Doo*, into eyes.

For Martin Denker the pronounced use and choice of colour, too, occupy a place as important principles of representation; they are also constituents of a forceful inner apparatus that contributes to determining the moods in each picture. Constructed out of numerous components, the visual and mental images obtain definition from the photographer's individual realm of sensibility. He clads the pictorial realities in a new, whole manifestation in subjective and unrepeatable manner and in what amounts to an avowal of Aristotle's statement for all the artist's painstaking planning – 'Art loves chance and chance loves art.' So Denker wittingly integrates the chance, casual and banal as well as the media world's visual extracts from his immediate sphere of perception. With his computer, he subjects them to digital reshaping and sets up new relationships that he has the knack of staging with a virtuoso hand. He continues on his chosen path of the photographic abstraction of reality. At the end of the processes of development and making, stand self-sufficient finds and inventions, autonomous images that explore undreamt-of visual dimensions and that challenge us with distressing projections of reality.