

NATALIA HUG

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Alwin Lay, Prospective #5
September 3 – October 17, 2015
Opening Reception September 2, 18-21h.

Alwin Lay's works often bear witness to a magical aura of things which seem to lead strange and self-determined lives of their own while the medium of photography itself remains a prerequisite or frame of reference. The conditions of photographic production, in the classical sense of material and process, as well as the use of the image carrier as a compositional concept emerge as two distinct components in his *Collodion* and *Olfa Black Edition (Fuji Crystal Archive)*.

The wall work, whose proportions refuse to subordinate themselves to the exhibition space, becomes a sort of laboratory situation. The larger than life, black, OLFA box cutter, a precise instrument with impressive capabilities, seems almost threatening as its blade parts the previously untouched material. The cut in the unexposed, blue, Fuji Crystal Archive Matte photo paper seems strangely constructed, the action portrayed and the materiality itself don't contextualise any concrete event, and yet the actorless scene seems to precisely dissect the destruction of the fragile material.

Much like in his earlier photography and video based works, the photo paper here is used to draw the implicated photographic processes into question while making seemingly purposeless actions into the work's self-expressed purpose. The clear black and blue colour composition, the grain of the blade and the work's oversized dimensions seem to invert scale relationships, making us into miniatures in Lay's laboratory. The cut is virtually tangible for the viewer seeming to almost open up the wall behind. There is a tension between graphic composition and three dimensional space.

As devoid of humans and object oriented as Alwin Lay's works often are, it is exactly this that allows them to lead (and seduce) the viewer as though he or she were a marionette, simultaneously making the viewer into both a detective and a sceptic. The lack of any human presence makes the objects themselves into characters and moments of confusion and manipulation become important instigators. With regard to his technical preoccupations and references to fragments of the photographic process, the artist draws on the puppeteer's craft. He lets things float open-endedly, enacting somewhat absurd plots while inflating themselves to larger than life proportions. He suspends one's sense of scale, letting one doubt the human measure.

The six part work *Collodion* expands the idea of a laboratory. It consists of an experimental or serial sequence depicting an action in time. The work shows a glass plate not dissimilar to those used in the collodion process, which was developed around 1850 in order to produce photographs by means of a negative process. The series alludes to the chemical process in which the glass plate is coated with a fluid, then dried and chemically prepared, in a series of darkroom steps, for exposure and the eventual production of a photographic image. The dark room is alluded to in the black background of Lay's magical image and in turn functions as a method of presenting the floating object. Fluid drips seemingly without end onto the glass surface, never approaching the subsequent step of hardening and thus avoiding a more pragmatic line of thought. This Sisyphian path, this pointless activity, disconnects itself from the conditions for the success of the technical process and leads to an image of its opposite.

Much like with the unexposed photo paper in the wall work, which is left helplessly exposed to the neon lights of the exhibition space and nonetheless remains unchanged, the technical requirements for the success of the process in *Collodion* seem to dissolve into air. Lay lets us witness a deception in which the presence and absence of light fail to trigger a process of transformation and instead declares doubt his main precept. Within factual impossibilities, he seeks opportunities for the photographic motif, open ended.

Carla Donauer

Alwin Lay (b. 1984) graduated from Düsseldorf Academy (class of Christopher Williams) and the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. Recent exhibitions include NAK.Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (solo, 2015), Düsseldorf Kunstverein, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, Haus der Photographie, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (all 2014). This is Lay's second exhibition with the gallery.