

THE HOBBYIST
HOBBIES, PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE HOBBY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

09.09.2017-28.01.2018
Fotomuseum Winterthur

What happens when photographers and artists incorporate hobbies into their work as a means of challenging artistic practices and hierarchies? How do hobbyists describe their passions photographically, not least today in our era of digital communication and online blogs? *The Hobbyist* is the first major exhibition to explore the relationship between photography and hobby culture, both in connection to photography of hobbies and also photography as a hobby practice. The exhibition examines, in five chapters, what a hobby might be in an age when our notions of private and social spheres have shifted due to the impact of the Internet. From the hippie and avant-garde cultures of the 1960s to the DIY craze of the 1980s and today's maker movement, *The Hobbyist* reflects on the variety of implications of both the hobby and the hobbyist.

The exhibition explores the specific places in which hobbies are pursued, and considers aspects of their commercialization in terms of consumer and lifestyle aspirations. By way of documents from the early 1970s, the exhibition looks back on the countercultures of that era, the hippiedom and the nascent computer community, which produced the prototypical tools for the future. Within the space of just two generations, the groundbreaking innovations have become an integral part of the individual and collective daily life. The fact that hobbies embody a passionate and ritualized form of enthusiasm is amply illustrated by the content and scope of the photographic works whose creators often operate on the boundary between documentarian and hobbyist, expert and amateur, probing the ways in which photography relates to some very quirky, offbeat and eagerly pursued hobbies.

THE WORLD AND THE SELF

In everyday life, hobbies play a strong role in building identity. Our interests are reflected in our leisure activities and present a platform on which we can define ourselves both outwardly and inwardly as individuals. Our self-image - whether physical or intellectual - is shaped, verified and conveyed through the way we spend our free time. The rise of digital and social media has further enhanced the importance of this aspect of (self-) representation.

However, hobbies do not just place the focus on the individual; they also bring people in touch with one another. Technological advances such as the Internet or mobile phone cameras have not only fueled an expansion of hobbies, but have also expanded the space within which our free time is spent. Global access has created an extended network of like-minded people. As in traditional clubs, the individual thus becomes part of a wider community. Through the ensuing suspense between public and private, work and play, creativity and consumerism, our (digital) pastimes impact the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

LEISURE AND LIFESTYLE

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the boundary between work and free time became simultaneously blurred and yet distinct. Artists explored the interface of documentarist, amateur and expert. They adopted practices from the nascent DIY culture and integrated both professional and amateur techniques into their artistic projects or applied photography.

The introduction of the five-day week offered everyone the opportunity of using their additional free time to counterbalance their workload by pursuing personal fulfillment. Whether camping, climbing or surfing – hobbies quickly found a foothold in mass culture and that potential was not only embraced by the hobbyists themselves, but was also exploited by the leisure industry. Hobbies structure the individual's free time and mold society according to group affiliations and identity traits expressed in the form of subcultures and lifestyles.

TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

The basis for digital culture with its dynamics of work and leisure, individuality and community, was already laid in the 1960s. The emergent hippie counterculture of the time fostered an alternative societal concept aimed at strengthening the individual and achieving autonomy from institutional authority. The *Domebook* and the *Whole Earth Catalog* were seminal publications in terms of making utopian ideas practicable. Whereas the former was intended as a construction manual for DIY accommodation in communal living projects, the latter was a holistic manual and product catalog offering readers the tools and technologies they needed to undertake everyday tasks independently. Stewart Brand, who issued the catalog, advocated a broad understanding of tools, ranging from canoes to backpacks to specialist literature on computer design.

The sense of community was also part and parcel of the hacker scene at the time. Hackers critically question established systems, intervene in them and try to modify them. The development of the video game *Spacewar!* and the advent of personal computers were innovations driven by creative collaborations of both engineers and hobbyists. Groups such as the Homebrew Computer Club, founded in Silicon Valley in 1975, which included Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs among its members, pushed for greater accessibility and wider opportunities for the individual. These developments were the precursors of today's information sharing and networking systems.

UN/SPECTACULAR PLACES

When it comes to pinpointing the location of hobbies, there can be a wide variety of places: a secluded clearing in the woods, a home basement, or a suburban allotment garden. These are meeting points and places of refuge for communicative exchanges or creative self-fulfillment that bear the traces of the banal and the quotidian.

Hobbies require a space where they can be carried out. That space is defined by the framework imposed on the respective activity. Yet at the same time, the hobby itself also has the potential to develop spaces as well

as the subversive power to open up new ones – whether conquering the airways or creating a social or political arena in which societal conditions and power structures become transparent. Ultimately, the process of photography not only captures these spaces visually, but is actively involved in producing them.

RITUAL PASSIONS

Hobbyists commit themselves with passion to their obsessions. An amateur devotes personal time to practicing and expertly honing a hobby by acquiring increasingly specialized knowledge. The hobby becomes a ritual somewhere between pure enjoyment and deadly seriousness, and so the hobbyist becomes a connoisseur and expert whose proficiency sets him or her apart from the average layperson.

Photography documents and accompanies these passions, offering amateurs the possibility of visually recording the fruits of their endeavors, showing them and sharing them with a wider public. At the same time, photography itself is a hobby that is passionately embraced. Mass-produced snapshots have found their way into the praxis of both hobby and art. They are collected, archived, filed and declared to be works of art. Compiled as collections, they provide a sweeping overview of private lives and popular culture alike – in short, the world of the hobbyist.

The Hobbyist is curated by Pierre Hourquet, Anna Planas and Thomas Seelig.

Kindly supported by Tarbaca Indigo Foundation and the Friends' Association Fotomuseum Winterthur. Further support by Volkart Foundation, Ringier AG, Ria & Arthur Dietschweiler Foundation, Olga & Ernst Gubler-Hablützel Foundation and Dr. Georg and Josi Guggenheim Foundation.

The exhibition is accompanied by a magazine published by Spector Books (15 CHF), containing artist interviews with Jeremy Deller/Alan Kane and NEOZOOM, short anecdotal texts and in-depth essays by Theodor W. Adorno, Olivia Baeriswyl, Doris Gassert, Samuel Herzog, Thilo Koenig, Evgeny Morozov and Therese Steffen.

A comprehensive events program relating to *The Hobbyist* features DIY workshops, discussions and performative readings, which will address further aspects of leisure and hobby culture. Please see the accompanying flyer and fotomuseum.ch for more information.