

## **Hennric Jokeit**

### *MIGRATIONS*

Chrome pigment prints on archival paper, 8 x 10 inches/18 x 24 cm, 2016

With his most recent work *Migrations*, Hennric Jokeit presents a new series of powerful and disturbing photographs. The protagonists comprise a select group of masks from various West-African regions. In a stimulating way, Jokeit takes up the challenge of visually reflecting on the many-layered physical and conceptual migrations masks such as these have undergone through time and space, thus provoking our thoughts and senses.

The aesthetic conception of West-African masks is bold, expressive, and highly confrontational. When they were first brought to Europe in large numbers as just one of the many preys of the colonial endeavor, they generated great public attention and had a significant influence on pioneering art movements of the time such as Cubism, Expressionism, and Surrealism. Questions of (mis-)appropriation by multiple European agents then and ever since have vehemently been addressed in post-colonial discourses, with regard to ownership and authenticity, to places and spaces of displaying such masks, as well as to their manifold instrumentalization.

As in previous works, Jokeit aims to seize the viewer's attention through his photographs. He challenges common visual perception, demanding the spectator establish a relationship to the image – that he or she engage with what Jokeit has aptly termed “native negatives.” The photographer has chosen to show some of the masks “naked”, as it were, in all their bluntness. In other cases he has carefully manipulated a piece. These interventions – adding sunglasses, cigarettes and headsets, wrapping and veiling – are targeted irritations that very explicitly address a confrontation of cultures, the short and long-term effects of migrations of things and of people. Here lies an intriguing parallel to the native context, where masks are made ready for their performance by adding elements such as hair or metal pieces marking the eyes or teeth; such interventions are not merely aesthetic devices, but rather a means to activate their agency.

Masks embody and mark liminal spaces; they represent spirits, ancestors, and beings from another world. Jokeit's photographic technique, a direct exposition of the paper, seems amenable to these powerful objects – a migration in its own right, from the three-dimensionality of the object to a manifestation of light and dark on the plane surface, offering an intense, breathing image. The performative dimension of masks becomes palpable, their aura, their ominous, ambivalent presence.

A conceptual focus on the scope and potential of photography characterizes the thirteen chrome-pigment prints in their remarkable chiaroscuro effects. If negatives represent the necessary complement and precondition for positives, masks as powerful agents in a symbolic communication system in turn may be understood to represent the counterpart of the living, the embodiment of an existential social threshold. Jokeit's *Migrations* demand an in depth reflection by the viewer, an increased consciousness both on the subject and on the medium, and on their respective transitions.

Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, Zürich, December 2016