

GALLERIES

An idea of Germany, from different angles

BY MARK JENKINS

With so many cameras in the world, it's much harder to get the shot that no one else could — or thought to — get. There are still art photographers who aspire to do that, but there's only one of them in "Gute Aussichten: Young German Photography 2011/2012," the latest annual competitive exhibition from German universities and academies. The work is heavily conceptual and usually involves manipulating the subject or image.

The most direct picture in the Goethe-Institut exhibition is of a severed cow's head in a white field marred by only a few drops of blood. Julia Unkel's portraits and still-lives contemplate the abattoir, its tools and its workers. But that head is the only example of the butcher's handiwork. The other photos are nearly antiseptic, and all the more ominous for that.

The other artist who doesn't dominate her images is Miriam Schwedt, whose nature photos look strange because they're so uncontemporary. The artist uses ancient (that is, 19th-century) photographic media to make one-of-a-kind pictures. By today's standards, these are indistinct and undetailed, but such defects now seem evocative. Using techniques that everyone else deems obsolete yields a sort of science fiction in reverse.

At the other end of the technological spectrum, Johannes Post doesn't use a camera at all. He places objects directly on a scanner, producing images from everyday stuff. Framed by large areas of black, the subjects are a mystery, until, in one, two shoe shapes give a clue. These are Post's clothes, in cross section. That makes the series a self-portrait, albeit one from which the artist is mischievously absent.

Three participants address ar-

chitecture, although in different ways. Franziska Zacharias makes constructions that she then photographs, with results that evoke both building details and early-20th-century geometric abstract paintings. Sebastian Lang photographs small houses in Hassloch, a town that German consumer researchers consider the country's ideal test market; the structures might be perfectly ordinary, but Lang's lighting renders them eerie.

More aggressively, Luise Schroder addresses another sort of representative community: Dresden, the German city that is said to have suffered the most destruction during World War II. Schroder regards this as fiction, and her response is to attack Dresden-related books and pictures with water, sand, a blade and a flamethrower. A video of the process plays in a loop near photos of the torn and singed remains. They're collages, essentially, made not with craft but by a sort of war.

Sara-Lena Maierhofer's series ponders a different sort of myth: the story of Christian Gerhartsreiter, a German con man who assumed many names, including Clark Rockefeller, and posed as a member of the wealthy American clan. Maierhofer's work wanders further from photography than any other in this show; it includes collages, letters, charts and a piece of toast. Yet its moral applies to most of the art in "Gute Aussichten": Don't simply believe what's put in front of your face.

Pete McCutchen

Photographing roller-coaster tracks outlined against the heavens is a cool way to make compositions of curves and spirals, as Pete McCutchen's "Tracks" demonstrates. Yet the artist's work is more concerned with color than shape. Some of his large-format prints, on display at Touchstone Gallery, show sinuous metallic swoops against a vivid blue sky. That shade might not

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be natural, however. The green, yellow and pink skies certainly aren't.

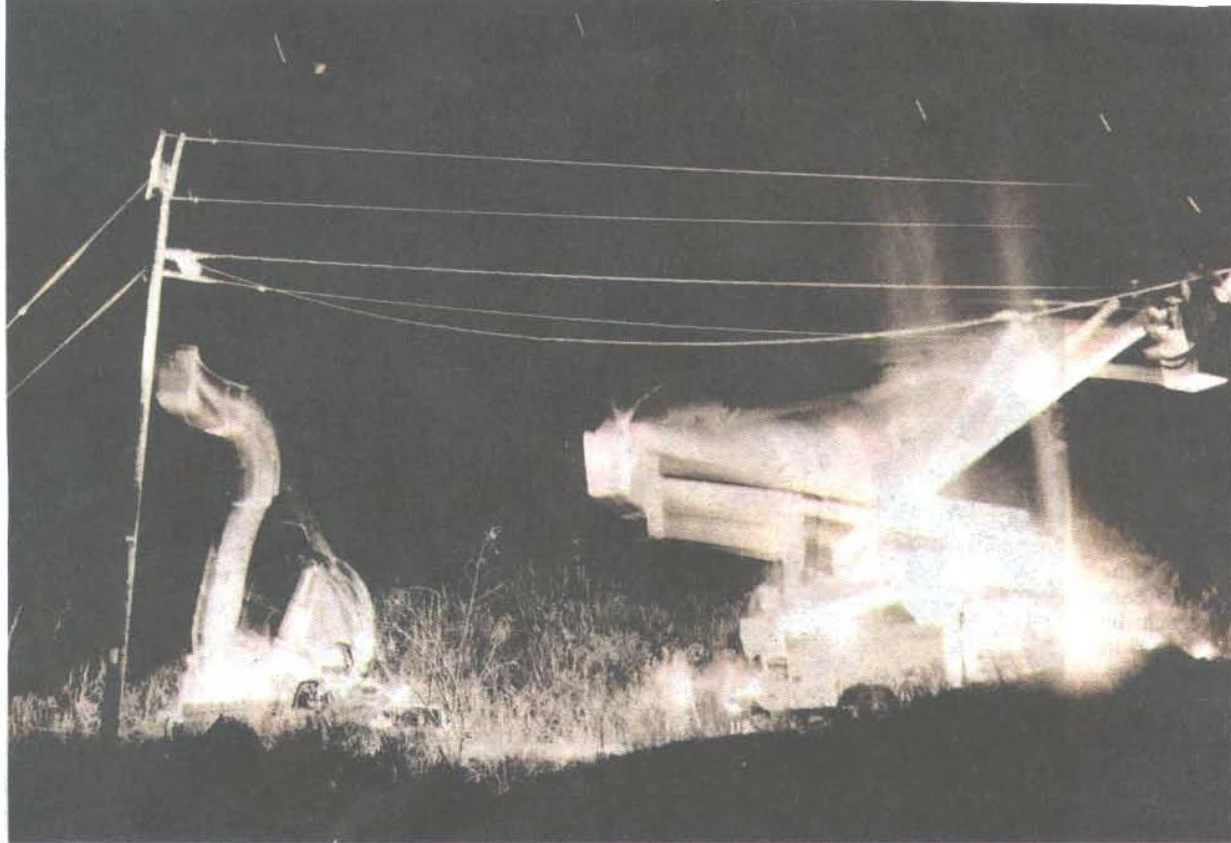
There are no clouds in McCutchen's photo illustrations, which usually turn their open spaces into expanses of pure day-glo. The artist often contrasts complementary colors — blue and yellow, green and magenta — to make the images pop.

"Pop" is exactly what McCutchen's work recalls, and he knows it. Two sets of four prints, each identical except for the hues, are titled "Homage to Andy," as in Warhol. Although these pictures don't use well-known faces or brands, McCutchen does share Warhol's interest in immediacy, repetition and decontextualizing the everyday. Terms such as "decontextualizing" often warn of a tough artistic slog, but not this time. "Tracks" is a lot of fun.

Colin Winterbottom

The Hill Center, which opened in November, is full of art by Capitol Hill residents. It's in hallways, foy-

BLURRING THE LENS: At left, Miriam Schwedt used 19th-century media for her images, on view with other German photographers' conceptual work at the Goethe-Institut. At the Hill Center, Colin Winterbottom captures the iconic Bartholdi Fountain on Capitol Hill, bottom left, and at the Touchstone Gallery, Pete McCutchen honors Andy Warhol in his shots of roller coasters.



COURTESY MIRIAM SCHWEDT/GOETHE-INSTITUT



COLIN WINTERBOTTOM/HILL CENTER



PETE MCCUTCHEN/TOUCHSTONE GALLERY

ers and several galleries named for local historical figures. Appropriately, the room that salutes pioneering photographer Mathew Brady currently holds work by Colin Winterbottom, who takes a traditional photographic approach to the city's neoclassical buildings. He still uses film and produces black-and-white images.

In Winterbottom's case, "traditional" doesn't mean staid. He shoots some of the most-shot D.C. landmarks — including the one that gives Capitol Hill its name — but from unusual vantage points and at unexpected tilts. The richly detailed, large-format prints include an off-kilter 1999 view of the Capitol dome, seen from a catwalk well into the sky, and a 2009 one of the McMillan filtration plant, looking upward from its shadowy bowels. Besides dramatic angles, the photographer often employs skinny, highly vertical compositions, and sometimes uses a wide-angle

lens to turn marble columns to rubber. There are a few more conventional pictures in this selection, but Winterbottom's most striking work skews postcard photography in novel directions.

Iwan Bagus

Another digital holdout, Iwan Bagus, made the original images in "Cryos" on Kodak slide film. But that was just the beginning of an unusual process. The artist then froze individual frames in ice and photographed them again through the near-transparent material. Boosting the project's already considerable metaphorical content, the ice-cube photos are self-portraits: close-ups of Bagus's face, neck, feet and other parts (including a few generally kept private).

Kodak went bankrupt while he was preparing this suite, Bagus notes, but the preservation of film photography is far from his only theme. The Studio Gallery show

also suggests the deterioration of memory and technology — and, of course, the body itself. The ice has small creases and bubbles, flaws that evoke singer Leonard Cohen's lines: "There is a crack in everything/That's how the light gets in." This small exhibition can be seen in a flash, but its implications develop more slowly.

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GUTE AUSSICHTEN: YOUNG GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY 2011/2012

on view through April 27 at the Goethe-Institut, 812 Seventh St. NW. Call 202-289-1200 or visit www.goethe.de/washington.

PETE MCCUTCHEN: TRACKS

on view through April 1 at Touchstone Gallery, 901 New York Ave. NW. Call 202-347-2787 or visit www.touchstonegallery.com.

COLIN WINTERBOTTOM

Photographs on view through March 28 at Hill Center, 921 Pennsylvania Ave. SE. Call 202-549-4172 or visit www.hillcenterdc.org.

IWAN BAGUS: CRYOS

on view through March 24 at Studio Gallery, 2108 R St. NW. Call 202-232-8734 or visit www.studlogallerydc.com.