

## Christian Martinelli and the collective *CubeStories*

galerie son in Berlin is showing the result of four years of work on a man-size camera – the *Cube* – by the photographer Christian Martinelli and the artists' collective *CubeStories*.

The idea for this minimalistic-looking camera came up four years ago in Beijing, China, when the photographers Christian Martinelli and Andreas Pizzini – the two ideators of the *Cube* – envisioned for fun a camera that could produce oversized photos without having to resort to magnifying. A portable camera, which with its image carrier could secure life-size pictures of its environment. Back home, they didn't drop the idea but instead tried to put it into practice, together with their friend Andrea Salvà.

After countless trials, there resulted a modular camera, 2 x 2 x 2 m in size, with a lens of 890 mm and a mirrored surface of Alu-Dibond – a light-weight material that makes it possible to transport the cube easily and to use it outside a studio.

In the *Cube* photography is reduced to its essentials: a light-tight case, a lens with a lens aperture and a board to fix the 1 x 1 m photographic paper on it. The light falls through the lens directly onto the photographic paper. In this way each image is unique, like a painting. There is no intermediate stage between the entrance of light and the emergence of the positive image. It is not possible to make reprints. In this respect, the images are literally *painted by light*.

In the 1930's, the philosopher and art theorist Walter Benjamin feared for the work of art's aura in the age of mechanical reproduction, directing his critique especially against photography, which had been created to reproduce its environment. In the process of the mechanical reproduction of a work of art its genuineness, its history and its authenticity would get lost, so he thought. The pictures created in the inside of the *Cube* escape this criticism, as they are not reproducible. Each picture is unique and therefore authentic.

The pictures are also authentic in their subject-matter. The immediacy of the picture's creation makes an intervention impossible. The pictures are honest and truthful. Similar to the first photographs that managed to record a non-subjective image of reality they convey a sense of directness.

When photographing, the photographer is inside the *Cube*-camera. The action of taking a picture is extremely reduced and highly complicated. The simplicity of the procedure is fascinating. Because of the unusual dimension of the pictures and the uniqueness of each picture, each step must be performed accurately.

The focus of the picture must be most carefully controlled, then the Ilfochrome paper is stretched out in total darkness. Finally, a shutter is opened and then closed. In the seconds in between one can see how the picture is being drawn on the photographic paper. Occasionally, the taking of a photograph can last a full day. The photographer's possibilities of intervention are reduced to a minimum.

The pictures that are thus created in the *Cube* are life-sized, razor-sharp color photographs with an excellent brightness of color. The mood of the pictures is always similar. On account of the camera's size the focal length, depth of focus and variations in framing the image are limited.

What also contributes to the uniqueness of these pictures is the finiteness of the photographic paper. The production of Ilfochrome-Photopaper, which is employed here, was stopped in 2011 after almost 50 years because the demand subsided. Through the treble coating, on which pictures are so to speak etched in, photos virtually acquire a haptic depth. In this way each photo stands also for a moment in the history of photography. 150 sheets of paper are still in the possession of Christian Martinelli, Andrea Pizzini and Andrea Salvà, the three faces behind *CubeStories*.

With this limited number of images Christian Martinelli set himself a goal. He wants to record the trivial, and therefore turned his lens on moments and views of our everyday life, which everyone seemingly knows and therefore receive no consideration. In them he is looking for the world's essence, similarly as the *Cube* is concentrating on the essence of photography. Martinelli's pictures record these ephemeral moments for eternity and pursue thereby almost a social endeavor. By elevating the trifles of life to subjects of photography he is showing his appreciation of the work of the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri. Martinelli is thereby adapting the concept of the "Democratic Camera", which the photographer William Egglestone introduced into photography.

The *Cube* is doing this in an unostentatious way. The Alu-Dibond gives the cube its reflecting characteristic, so it can get near to its subject unobtrusively. The *Cube* is incorporated into its surroundings and incorporates them into itself, as the picture it is reflecting is also the one which it is retaining. This duality is underlined by Martinelli's documentation about the use of the *Cube*, which provides images that are by themselves fascinating.

*CubeStories* is by any account a project of superlatives, which shows its impact best in the original. Absolutely worth seeing!

Text: Verena Malfertheiner  
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**Christian MARTINELLI „CubeStories: Start“**

installation & unique photography

exhibition 6 October 2012 – 24 November 2012

OPENING Saturday 6 October 2012 at 7pm

**galerie son**

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