

Reduction of Means Deployed: On the Photographs of Friederike von Rauch

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Friederike von Rauch is one of those artists whose works surprise us at first glance by their clarity and total reticence. But behind her pictures we can sense that the perceptible simplicity is the result of precise, painstaking preparation and very clear thinking about her own procedure. Von Rauch has set herself rules for her work which she follows, focusing crucially on the question of the truth of the pictures. She uses only analogue photography for her photos. Thus in the age of the total digitalization of images she still adheres to traditional photographic methods. That helps avoid any temptation to hand over all responsibility to the computer and the corresponding programs. She takes only real places as her subjects. She does not invent, she finds. She makes no change to reality as she finds it. She works only with natural light or existing light sources. And lastly, she keeps the camera at eye level, not tilted, and always occupies a point of view an observer could attain under natural circumstances. These self-imposed rules do not imply any dogma or compulsion for her; they are a natural inner propensity. For her, her principles are normal and a matter of course, therefore she remains true to herself and her aesthetic without experiencing any doubts. No disruptive detail is altered, shifted, or covered up; rather she spends as long as it takes looking for the right viewing angle until everything fits into the concept she has developed of a picture. That can take time, and occasionally she does not reach that point because the light or other elements of reality fail to correspond to her concept. If that is the case, she does not take a photograph.

For a long time Von Rauch has devoted herself to photographing architecture, or, to be more precise, places determined by architecture. In this, her approach relates directly to the subjects she has selected, the two being interdependent. The process of finding her subjects represents a substantial part of her work. She seeks out suitable places for her pictures in different ways, through asking questions and researching architectural travel guides and books, from which she then arranges her routes. All these methods are only aids, for often she finds the places that seem to her to be suitable for a picture only beyond her predetermined routes. Thus in Brussels, for instance, she accidentally discovered the archive relating to Belgian forced labor in Germany when she was looking for an Art Deco building. She occasionally stumbles across such historically significant places to her own astonishment, but does not make this surprise a theme in her pictures. Almost every one of Von Rauch's pictures has a story behind it, whether because it deals with places that are special from a historical or architectural point of view, or because there is a story attached to the finding of the place itself. But Von Rauch does not want to tell stories with her pictures; they deliberately refrain from providing a narrativity.

Friederike von Rauch's way of working is determined by a firm commitment to the utmost precision and extreme restraint: precision in technique and implementation, restriction in selection and means. Therefore when working she prefers to be on her own and with only as much equipment as she can carry herself. She seeks to concentrate on the essential. She fathoms out what that essence of a place or