

Tor Seidel

Tor Seidel is a German artist who pursued an MA in Art, Philosophy and Archeology at the Frei Universität Berlin. He has formerly worked as commercial photographer for clients ranging from Zaha Hadid to Vogue, and as art director for European art, architecture, fashion and archeology magazines. Currently, Tor is lecturer in the Fine Arts program at the University of Sharjah, and is represented by The Empty Quarter Gallery in Dubai. He has published two books on the Emirate, "The Dubai", (Hatje-Cantz 2014), and "Mannequins", (Kerber 2018), and has exhibited in London, Miami, Berlin, and Venice. In 2016, Tor received the Syngenta Photo Award.

Tell us about your current practice.

My latest work is about my interest in soap as an object of information and particularly looks at it as a data set for considering the populations of the UAE. In Spectrum 1, I gathered 156 kinds of soap that are available in the country and transformed them, changing the shape, color, and smell of the different varieties through a process of shredding, melting, and casting them into identical molds. I designed a questionnaire and tracked people's responses to the varieties, creating a qualitative data set to coincide with the quantitative characteristics such as chemical-olfactory composition, origin, and distribution. The commercial identifiers have been lost and each soap-ingot is transformed into a kind of blueprint full of data to be read collectively across the full spectrum of soaps through their own imperfections and surface texture that developed through the identical molding process. They read as a type of visual archive of the memory and personal ritual through an everyday medium that is tied to the personal experience of cleansing.

In Scent Fields, 10 casted soap bars are stored in a cabinet in compartments. The visitor opens the cabinet door and experiences its scent and the memories it triggers of rooms, experiences, people, stories, or feelings. The absence becomes the presence, the intangible experience, bridging time and distance. These have been particularly crafted blending the scents of separate experiences documented in the questionnaire. They become complex scent compositions that are collective memories rather than those tied to a specific individual.

Why do you use soaps as your material?

Soap is the perfect medium to work with smell, scent and their direct link to memory/association. In another consideration I found that the colors in soaps, based on natural ingredients or chemicals, arranged in a certain order/composition can display a specific color space. In another new work where I'm working with soap both, smell and color are combined to trigger our associations. In my research I found that many synaesthetic sensations revolve around smells, colors and sounds.

How does your work fit in the contemporary art world?

I guess the "art-world" is big so that I cannot answer that. I think, as I am originally coming from 2d orientated art practice with photography, the viewers always passive. Does he understand the subtext; he has just to follow my path. But here, I can be sure that the work with smell related to

memory is involving the viewer much more in an active manner. At the moment I'm not so interested in images to overwhelm or to impress the viewer. Smell is not visible, but the moment where I can talk to the viewer is much more satisfying, I guess for both, the viewer and me.







