

*secret universe*

Horst Ademeit

Horst Ademeit (1937–2010)

“Over a period of 20 years I shot Polaroid and digital photos covering the edges with writing thus venting all the annoyances that life and the district of Flingern in Düsseldorf brought me with radiation-coldness destruction theft dirt garbage bulky refuse construction sites cars scaffoldings demolitions and new buildings also floods of court proceedings at the end I spent ½ year in the hospital gave up the apartment thus sealing that time now since I have been living peacefully for almost 1 year in an old people’s home it becomes clearer to me that without my fighting against all that misery with photos and writing etc. activities I could hardly have survived safe and sound with thanks to the Lord heaven and earth”

Horst Ademeit, Düsseldorf 2009

Horst Ademeit was born out of wedlock in Cologne and directly after his birth he was put into an orphanage. At the beginning of the Second World War, at the age of two, he was taken to the Thuringian town of Zella-Mehlis as part of the “Kinderlandverschickung,” a program to evacuate children from German cities, and was taken in by a foster family with whom he stayed until the end of the war in 1945. Back in Cologne, he lived in a children’s home in Ehrenfeld, Cologne. In 1952 he left elementary school after the eighth grade and started an apprenticeship as a house painter. After his military service he struggled along doing illicit work, but in his leisure time he indulged in literature, music, drawing, and painting. In 1963 he worked as a precision engineer before beginning his studies at the Cologne Werkkunstschule in 1964. First he studied decorative painting with Anton Wolff and then textile design with Helmut Kaldenhoff. In 1968 he married a fellow student and transferred to the Werkkunstschule Krefeld, where he gained his diploma in textile design in 1970. In the winter semester of 1970/71, he registered at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and was assigned to Joseph Beuys’s class. But Ademeit’s academically composed still lifes, watercolors, and nudes weren’t in line with the spirit of

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the academy; Beuys pejoratively called his work decorative art. Ademeit withdrew from the academy, his marriage failed, and in 1972 he divorced. He studied education at the Pädagogische Hochschule Rheinland in Neuss until 1976, but never worked in the field. Unemployed, he earned a small amount of work on the side by doing renovation work and manual labour. During this period, he took his first photographs of building rubble and cellars, masonry and electric cables. The renovation jobs secured his livelihood, and at the end of the 1970s he exhibited the early pictures and lithographs from his time at the Werkkunstschule, some of which he sold. In 1987 he moved into a welfare apartment in the Düsseldorf district of Flingern, where the notion started to manifest itself that cold rays, earth rays, electromagnetic waves, and various other rays had an impact on his wellbeing. He began protecting himself against radiation exposure with magnets and medicinal herbs, and started taking photos of measuring devices, his apartment, and his immediate surroundings, though at that point not in a strictly systematic way. In 1990 he bought a Polaroid camera, which became his medium for the next one and a half decades. Ademeit meticulously documented his environment with the camera and arranged a daily newspaper next to food, thermometers, light meters, moisture detectors, compasses, and Geiger counters. He shot a total of 6,006 of these daily photos, which over time were supplemented by increasingly complex handwritten notes on the edges of the Polaroid photos. The documentary photos of his apartment and surroundings, as well as the photographic observations of himself as well as animals, were also framed with writing, creating a close link between text and image. He simultaneously filled calendars and leporello fold booklets with detailed descriptions of his observations and of daily events. In 2004 he switched to a digital camera; while the subject matter of his photographic documentations remained the same, there were no longer any written additions. So as to protect himself against the cold rays, Ademeit wore small wooden spheres on his body, which he had turned himself with a lathe; their size, eight millimeters, corresponds with the maximum open width of the human pupil. In 2008 he relocated to an old people's home in Düsseldorf, where he gave an employee he trusted the approximately 10,000 Polaroid photos. Via the physician, Dr. Behrends, they were brought to the Susanne Zander Gallery in Cologne, where they were exhibited for the first time in 2009. In 2010 Matthew Higgs premiered Ademeit's work in New York at White Columns. In spring 2010 a documentary film on Ademeit was produced, directed by Michael Bauer and Marcus Werner Hed. In July 2010 Horst Ademeit died of cancer in Düsseldorf. The Susanne Zander Gallery now administrates his estate.