

# *katrin korfmann*

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Ensembles assembled

Bird's-eye or drone? Amour de soi or amour-propre ?

Questioning the superintendent and the participator in unifying events.

Katrin Korfmann's work reveals a bird's-eye view perspective to us in which people are photographed moving in the scene below, capturing them in static images that present an abstract of human interaction. Strongly aesthetic, its dynamic bound by the grid of everyday life. Korfmann's new work records a different kind of interaction: rather than independent persons moving from a to b individually, it shows many people merging into one being. As presented in this book, the passage of time at a location is represented by a change in colour and a sculptural blending of matter and people, producing a symbolic sum.

Korfmann's works portray social dimensions of perception, such as the relationship between the observer and the observed, the effect of the camera on behaviour and the social codes of looking in a public environment. Expanding on photographic techniques to frame images and construct perspectives in various media, ranging from photo works to videos and installations, she reveals landscapes of social dynamics.

In Korfmann's recent work the technical and visual conventions she puts in play obey to both a visual and a conceptual principle. She arrived at this by questioning the documentary and narrative aspect of photography and its reputation as "witness to the truth". Using the bird's-eye view she places the event's ephemerality centre stage and creates a suggestion of distance for the spectator.

Colour, the visual motive of the new series and the biggest motive in this book, naturally has an important symbolic role in our identification within the visual culture. Among other means, colour communicates through accents, its visual mass or the dynamic it generates. "Things are never black or white" and the rainbow "happens" to be the contemporary symbol of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement. In painting, colour has been utilized extensively: from its role in Suprematism to its place in Colour Field and Hard-edge Painting. In this photo series colour acts as a social catalyst, ritually levelling people's social diversity in a euphoric common celebration of dignity that makes it easier for people to put an arm around someone, even if that someone is their grumpy neighbour. Therefore, this book is also a call to reconsider our identification of the colour surrounding us. At what costs do we bring colour to our lives?

Stage and play: a horizontal and a vertical way of being.

We all act against a background of floors, walls, streets, grounds, skies and so on where we encounter other people, objects and scenes. This is our horizon, facing the world and all of its gestures horizontally. We apply an anthropocentric perspective here, very much due to the fact that our perspective is catalysed by experiences close to our body. We tend to experience this day-to-day horizontal stage holistically, as a certain completeness.

We are confronted with this more abstractly when mirroring our anthropocentric being on the level of our actions - the teleological level. Here we reflect vertically as we take on a perspective above our horizon. Such a position portrays and situates our sublunary existence to ourselves.

As we dive into the imagery of this book and perceive more detail, we encounter behavioural specifics of scenic settings and cultural politics within the sum. What we experienced to be equal to an ant-hill reveals itself as a pile of actors. Here, a vertical perspective on our existence – the birds-eye abstraction closing the gap between our and a divine perspective – is competing with our day to day horizontal view; suddenly our horizon becomes a whiteout and we experience ourselves here as actors directed by an innocent tabula rasa to the extent that our imagination allows us to consider our vertical anthropocentric teleology.

Event and play: a cultural concern.

Korfmann's series comments on the phenomena she photographed, both anthropologically and sociologically, through an overarching psychological game. Anthropological: as the potential of a "colourful life" in which the colouristic ritual offers a catharsis-like cohesion in a euphoria brought about by a common "complexion". Sociological: as an event in which any differences based on appearance are dissolved in the form of a game. In both instances people are being (psychologically) triggered by a euphoria that is released from within. Noticeably, these collective rituals, that usually take place in smaller urban or rural communities following long-standing traditions, have recently been copied and adopted by the metropolises of this world. The Holi festival, for example, has been taken out of its original context and is now being celebrated by thousands of young people in Berlin, New York or New Jersey. Another phenomenon is the 'colour run', a five kilometre race with thousands of runners wearing white at the start and finishing plastered in colour. This run is organised 'to promote healthiness and happiness by bringing the community together to participate in the "Happiest 5k on the Planet"' and is currently happening worldwide. These "events" raise the question why these levelling colour festivals are drifting around in a globalised culture allowing for the distribution of events based on eclectic sources, disconnected from their original motivation. It also tests the position of the image as art, being a higher form of representation or identification: exactly because art feeds expressions and relationships that should transcend subcultures and pop-cultural trends.

Here, the "event" resonates with the phenomena of "festivalisation" and the push for experience that both drive culture in the neoliberal regime. Festivalisation is evidently present because the local traditions seem to be hijacked both as a visual strategy, in which the phenomenon of the colouring "event" is taken from its original roots to become a mere experience, and as the appropriation of this strategy in a rather rootless top-down framework. It becomes even more cynical if you realise that the qualities of the event's visual strategy are such powerful participatory catalysts that they take over not just our bodies but also our minds. This, in turn, says a lot about the teleological nature of the material basis of the phenomenon itself, appropriated by the event as techniques. While in origin these phenomena did have a levelling power to temporarily dissolve social, religious or otherwise rooted tensions, they are now being exploited to play the horizon of the event in an a-political, festive manner. It is much like the Olympic Games or art biennales that claim to celebrate something higher than the political reality within which they are situated while they lose track of the ground level from which they should foster elevation or, in this case, catharsis. Evidently the globalised events do generate a longing and a sharing of that longing, but that being said: they do not open up opportunities to acknowledge diversity and tolerance but simply celebrate diversity within a like-minded crowd.

Playing joy, levelling diversity?

In one fluent movement, Korfmann portrays the realistic truth of the horizon with vertical, abstract desire: an image of social realism and euphoric utopianism. This combination, captured in her imagery and happening in the events portrayed, is of a highly dangerous nature, for, when appropriated by any regime - such as the regime of cultural events playing a neoliberal tolerance -, it starts manifesting a populist agenda: playing upon our sense of

joy and involvement while levelling all diversity beyond the event. This imagery portrays a liberating sphere to some but not necessarily the liberal it seems to convey; a liberal that overcomes actual differences. For this it requires respect to its source and openness to bottom-up mechanisms. These populist agendas can hardly be said to pave the way for artistic sublimation or slow poetics that fundamentally question the “happening”. Therefore these images celebrate visual qualities and strategies as technical opportunities but simultaneously warn us for their appropriation of our horizon.

As such, this highly visual work should not feed into a visual hunger per se but, catalysed by this hunger, should ask us to reconsider that hunger and our involvement in the visual present. If we take the representations of these cultural sources at their source and level up anthropologically by stepping beyond the horizontal, we enter another play: a richer play, a play not of mere bodies and matter in a technically directed scene but a play in which we level souls, built by heritage and social contexts: by a history of minds and bodies relating. We are looking at highly tempting imagery that is manipulated in order to release its full spectrum of socially viable visual opportunities to articulate participation and catalyse a levelling. It might just be possible, in this era of levelling globalisation, to take the level to the glocal and connect on a more fundamental anthropological level beyond the anthropocentric. These works remain “bigger pictures”, in themselves and in their openness to the living heritage these events respond to and the future they open up to. This is a tolerance over the anthropocentric. And indeed it is not just a sculptural sum blending all diversity into one clump: these photos are, in their original size, large scale and allow us to note the individual behaviour within the sum and express the postures of individual expressions and actions as protagonists and antagonists, either passive or active.

The framing of the anthropocentric and the democratic within the horizontal and vertical in art’s display and relating. We can compare the conditioning that takes place in the phenomenon of the globalizing event – basically of a cultural levelling encounter - with the encounter happening in the “art world”. Here, the contexts of locations and the way they are situated to their audiences places such a powerful lens over the works that we, at times, lose track of the reality that is supposed to be reflected in the works. It is like a vertical ruling over any horizontal on site, which takes over the opportunity to engage with the horizontal level of the work. Their momentum is celebrated over their sources, which are not rooted in the audience. As such, the way the art event is situated in its horizontal and vertical context is also reflected in this series, in which images don not pronounce a façade to confront but rather a people-based source to engage with.

At the moment I am writing this, we don’t know yet how most of these works or the full series will circulate; where and how they will be framed and received. We do know the Kolorit photos have been received well. The full series carries dignity because, in any situation, it opens up from the anthropological to the anthropocentric and from the anthropocentric to the anthropological at the same time. Either way, the series requires a second step: a coming to terms with the featured contexts, to live up to the full dignity it spans.

The work is, in the end, democratic over anthropocentric. It unifies through its abstract of our living democracy in which we act alongside and together with others. It offers a democratizing birds-eye view rather than a surveying view of a drone. Through the luring qualities of the coloration and composition, inviting us to close reading and understanding, the work overcomes the anthropocentric. By providing information in the book of the actual anthropological history of the “events” portrayed at the start of each series, we also hope to encourage a more profound curiosity. It leaves us respectful to the less evident capacity of culture in conjunction with respect for the capacity of the visual it evidently beholds.

### Bridging and summing

The series manifests an in-between of a lyrical tribute of the visual itself and/or a lyrical tribute to the anthropological and, in this sense, can trigger both our amour-propre and our amour de soi and can flourish on every location. Moving the glocal embedding of our teleological relations to the day-to-day reality, reflecting an existence in between play and event, it makes us reconsider our holistic actions within a greater sum where we may set the level. It opens up: fresh and, in a broad sense, unprejudiced.

Through her tempting, air-trafficked release that brings the vertical into our horizon, Korfmann allows us to ease down socially comfortable, providing social release in respect of a day-to-day plurality that spans uncertainties, doubts and even conflicts. The work presented here is a respectful highlight on living traditions that can, hopefully, keep up with present and following changes of the times.

Freek Lomme  
2014

Freek Lomme is a freelance curator and writer and an amateur poet. He is the founding director of Onomatopee, exhibition space and publishing house based in Eindhoven, The Netherlands. If you want to know more, you know where to go.