

# POSTMASTERS

postmasters 459 w 19 street nyc 10011 212 727 3323

fax 212 229 2829

postmasters@thing.net

for immediate release:

April 16 – May 16, 2009

**WOLFGANG STAEHLE**

***A Matter of Time***

Postmasters is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Wolfgang Staehle.

*A Matter of Time* is comprised of four real time projections of time-lapse photographic sequences and a premier video work of a Yanomami Village in the Brazilian rain forest. The show will be on view from April 16 until May 16, 2009. An opening reception is scheduled for Thursday, April 16, between 6 and 8 pm.

*A Matter of Time* draws upon mid-19th century painter Thomas Cole's series *The Course of Empire*. Cole's historically critical rumination views pastoralism as the ideal model for civilization, fearing that the ideal of Empire inevitably results in greed and decay.<sup>1</sup> While *A Matter of Time* holds the mirror of this salient socio-political commentary up to our own time, it is one whose reflection is without indignation to the systems themselves. Perhaps, best encapsulated in the artist's own 1989 work which avows, "Empires crumble, republics collapse, and idiots live on;" the posit follows that it is our own inordinate ability to destroy the sublimity of any civilization's ideal that is put on the table.<sup>2</sup>

However, Staehle's work in no way relies upon homage to Cole's series, a foray to pastoralism or political satire. Evident in his body of work, the form is always central; and previous works have underscored time—a one-to-one, linear time, a simulative "real time" or the contrivance of frozen time. In this exhibition, *A Matter of Time* broadly refers to the time lapse photographic sequences (approximately 15,000 photographs per day at 10 frames per minute) but presented here in real time—a rate so methodical that it denudes the image of its cinematographic aspect, while accentuating it pictorially. By allowing us to exact the machinations of nature, through figuratively arresting time, a perceptual shift is created that video does not pose, and thereby realigns our relationship with the real. Each contiguous moment pre-empts the prior, switching out the obsolete image for a perpetually updated "now."<sup>3</sup> Is it that the representation of an object's stasis recalls the full force of its movement? Because ultimately, it is this indeterminate relation with time that drives our experience with these quietly unsettling works.

In the front gallery space, four projections surround the viewer with time-lapse photographs from Umbria, August 30, 2006; Manhattan, September 10, 2001; Palast der Republik, November 28, 2006;<sup>4</sup> and Forum

Romanum, September 15, 2007. Unlike Cole's series of a single imaginary city, these disparate representations of questionably-modern civilization respond to each other like a meditative dialogue between empires, or within the "global empire." Not only is time arrested by its form but heightened by the rise or fall of the imperialist ideal it might represent.

No truer than in the back gallery space, where a single large video projection illuminates the sites of Watoriki, a Yanomami Village within the Amazon rainforest. Out of the morning fog murmurs of the indigenous language become audible, parrots squeak and jungle vegetation rustles; throughout sleepy daytime banalities, the pitch of night is intercut, where from the village centre the gurgling Shaman orates. One of the last unsullied civilizations on the globe, the Yanomami village scene reminds us of an inescapable relativism. Itself, metaphorically, arrested in time, the scene asks us to slow our gaze and reconsider our perception of all civilization.

Staehele first appeared on the New York scene in the 1980s as a video artist, but he has since become world-renowned as a pioneer of the uncontrollable, loosely defined field of new media art. His recent work, most notably his 2001 "Untitled" real time projection of Lower Manhattan, has been distinguished for its silent grandeur, mundanity and simple conjuring of the ceaselessness of time, light and life.<sup>5</sup> Since Wolfgang Staehle's last 2004 exhibition at Postmasters, his work has been featured in "Time Zones," Tate Modern, London, "Closed Circuit," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and "The Cinema Effect," Hirshhorn Museum, Washington. An upcoming publication, "Net Pioneers," by Sternberg Press, in conjunction with an exhibition at the Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, September 2009, will feature Staehle's seminal media project "The Thing."<sup>6</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cole, "The Course of Empire", 1834-36, collection of New York Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, "Bande à part" (Band of Outsiders), 1964

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Gordon, "Projecting Dreams," The Cinema Effect: Illusions, Reality, and the Moving Image, Hirshhorn Museum, exhibition publication, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Demolition of the "Palast der Republik," parliament of the GDR, in favour of the contentious Berlin Stadtschloss site.

<sup>5</sup> Roberta Smith, "In New York's Galleries, a New Context Seems to Remake the Art", New York Times, September 19, 2001

<sup>6</sup> Organized by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, Media.Art.Research, Vienna, Linz.

*Postmasters Gallery located at 459 west 19<sup>th</sup> Street is open Tuesday through Saturday between 11 and 6 pm. For further information, please contact Magdalena Sawon at 212 727 3323 or email [postmasters@thing.net](mailto:postmasters@thing.net).*

