

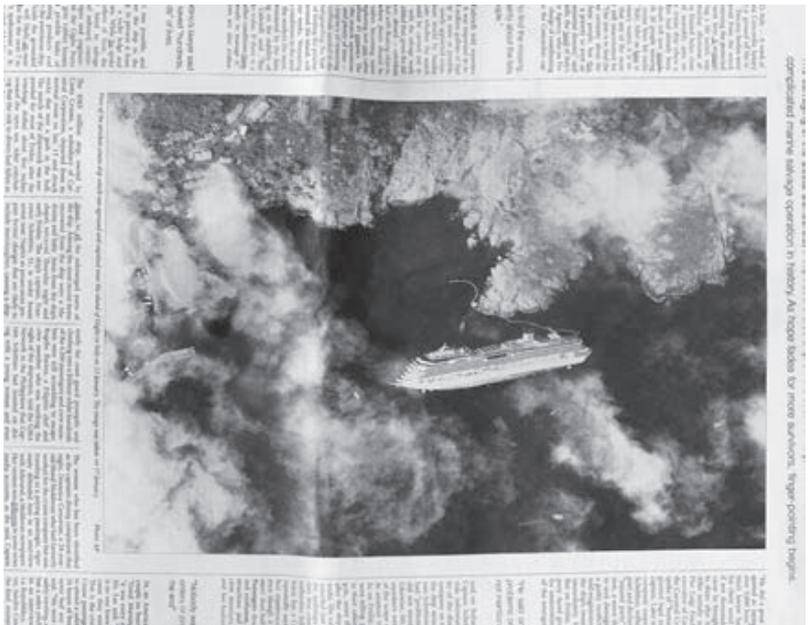
Natalie Czech

HOME OF DOROTHEA AND RUDOLF ZWIRNER

Rudolf Zwirner, legendary gallery owner, art dealer, and curator, and Dorothea Zwirner, art historian and author, regularly use their private residence in Berlin-Grünwald to put on (public) solo shows of younger artists. They recently picked Natalie Czech, in whose poetic conceptual photographs image and word subtly dovetail. For this show, the artist selected works from her series “Hidden Poems,” begun in 2010. Nine pieces in various formats were distributed among several rooms in the house, sometimes displayed in discreet proximity to works from the couple’s private collection.

“Hidden Poems” takes the notion of the literary found object and combines it with photography. Czech, who as a reader has always taken a personal interest in the graphic quality of short lyrical texts, at first picked out a poem by German author Rolf Dieter Brinkmann in an art-magazine article about Louise Lawler: not directly as a quote but as a concatenation of individual words and letters scattered throughout the text. Czech marked these elements with a purple highlighter; read in sequence, they spell out the poem, just as if parasitical text had infiltrated the primary level of signification. For her photograph, she selected a particular detail of the open magazine spread that also contains two illustrations.

These short poems by selected authors that appeared—apparently by chance—in text/image constellations drawn from books and magazines (along with Brinkmann, the writers featured to date include Robert Creeley, Frank O’Hara, e. e. cummings, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Aram Saroyan) are language pictures in a double sense: Czech’s photographs can be read as concrete or surrealist poetry and at the same time can be understood as conceptual photography. For her, a text in and of itself is already an image. The gesture of “hiddenness” she stages from one text to the next is an ironic, poetic device. It implicitly asserts that, for example, in *A hidden poem by Aram Saroyan*, 2012, the poem “a man stands / on his / head one / minute— // then he / sit / down all / different” already existed in its unexpected new context beforehand, that its point of origin is the same as that of its containing text. Of course, this is literally true: The words are there, the sequence is correct. But does this suffice for us to say the poem itself was already there? And if so, might there not be other poems “hidden” here as well? Czech is fascinated by the notion of all the texts potentially present in any text.



Natalie Czech, *A hidden poem by Aram Saroyan*, 2012, C-print, 16¾ x 21⅝". From the series “Hidden Poems,” 2010–.

She found Saroyan's lyrical passage in a newspaper article about the cruise liner *Costa Concordia*, which hit a reef in early 2012 near the Italian coast and capsized. Underlining the word fragments with a thin blue felt-tip pen, she performs a minimalist intervention that gives the black-and-white newspaper its only touch of color. The outer columns of text are cut off by the frame, and Czech shows the clipping on its side. By doing so, she has not only disrupted the normal flow of reading, but also gives the newspaper photo that takes up most of her picture a horizontal orientation; in this dramatic bird's-eye-view shot of clouds, buildings, and coastline, the ship looks like a beached whale. This shift of perspective is much like the one in Saroyan's poem, which makes the man who's does a headstand "sit / down all / different."

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

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of this romantic ruin
the ceiling for future

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