

Press release

Paul Graham | a shimmer of possibility

14.06. – 26.07.2008

Vernissage: 13.06. 6 p.m. – 9 p.m.

We are delighted to announce the opening of Paul Graham's second solo exhibition in Berlin. The photographer, who was born in England in 1956, lives and works in London and New York. Graham has made probably one of the most significant contributions to contemporary photography in recent years in the cycle "A shimmer of possibility", which came into being over the last few years, with a 12-volume edition published by Steidl in 2007. The exhibition at carlier | gebauer comprises eight works from the cycle.

Graham is part of the tradition of US photographers such as Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander or Robert Frank, and the art world's reception of their work from the 1970s on. Since the early 80s the evolution of Graham's photographic work has slotted into the tradition of classical English documentary photography around Martin Parr, Richard Billingham, Tom Wood, Paul Seawright and others. Graham has made a significant contribution to renewing and extending the scope of the visual language in documentary photography and British social critique.

A wide-ranging portrait of the USA in the 21st century has come into being in "A shimmer of possibility". The title cites the Russian author Anton Chekhov, whose succinct use of words Paul Graham counters with a kindred concision in photography. In just a few shots Graham moves in closer to a moment, its depiction not concluded but its meaning tapped into as part of a continuum of human life. In photography Graham reflects the openness and transparency of Chekhov's stories, which seize the moment without categorising it.

Each of the works addresses a drama en miniature, which unfolds with a sparse economy in just a few sequences of images, without adhering to a linear narrative rhythm in the process. Unlike the monumental photographs from the "American Nights" series, which almost vanish in their pronounced shadowing or glaring illumination, the works in "A shimmer of possibility" are composed of up to 15 individual photographs, grouped in sequences and various different sizes to form a multi-part work with echoes of Wolfgang Tillmann's oeuvre.

The works have also moved on from a clearly political thrust in the subject-matter. "American Nights" sets people living on the fringes of society at the core of Graham's work. Their portraits dissolve into glaring over-exposure as if they did not exist or as if all memories of them were going to vanish instantaneously. Whilst "A shimmer of possibility" does also have political undertones, the strength of the new series lies in the way it avoids subsuming images into simplifying categories. Graham depicts moments in-between, intermediate places, people in transition moving between an undetermined before and after, in which each moment and each image bears an intrinsic "shimmer of possibility". As Paul Graham put it in an interview in 2007: "Just slow down and look at this ordinary moment of life. See how beautiful it is, see how life flows around us, how everything shimmers with possibility."

Since the mid-80s Paul Graham's works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions at venues including: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Tate Gallery in London, the Fotomuseum Winterthur and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. A comprehensive retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Folkwang, Essen in 2009 and at the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 2010 will pay tribute to Graham's work.