

## Franziska Glozer Rubble Field



#83 The Frank Silde Show

Adopting the format of a book, a pictorial narrative that can be browsed by the viewer, *Shattered Flow* is the first comprehensive survey of Markus Schwander's series of works *The Frank Slide Show*, *Goldau, vorher – nachher* [*Goldau, Before – After*], *Steine im Lager* [*Deposited Stones*], and *Flimstüden* [*Studies on Flims*]. The artist himself presents this pictorial overview as the “physical result” of his multi-year research activities dedicated to landslides, offering a new form of engagement with the physical

event of the “picture” that is addressed as a dispositif of an aesthetic exploration. The following essay attempts to contribute to Markus Schwander's proposed concept of research in an investigation of the artist's image production as a dispositif, “method”, “device”, or “action plan” of a landslide in its present rendition as a picture.

*A collage is a conglomerate of images, a contextual conglomerate, a motif-based conglomerate.*

*In this case each single picture created by Markus Schwander consists of a diverse range of representations of rocks and rock constellations, or rock incidents.*

Markus Schwander first began exploring the phenomenon of landslides in his work in 2008, during a study trip when he visited the site of the *Frank Slide*, one of Canada's most massive landslides that occurred in 1903. He dwelled in the midst of the relicts of the landscape investigating what has been physically preserved on the site as a transformed massif.<sup>1</sup> Exceeding a certain magnitude, "the movement of a mass or rock, debris or earth down a slope" is scientifically defined as a landslide,<sup>2</sup> and in contrast to the landslides of *Flims* and *Goldau*, whose occurrence can only be gleaned today from scattered, partially sedimented seams between the original ("naturally developed landscape") and the "landslide landscape", the *Frank Slide* belongs to the visible landslides. The *Frank Slide* can most decisively be linked to the

symbolic image of a rockslide: the toppled mountain, which to this day sprawls below the towering mountainous wound as a tongue of land consisting of slip rock and debris.

During the course of the site investigation, the perspective shifted. From the very beginning, Schwander undertook his forays into and through the rockslide territories equipped with a photo camera as a visual recording instrument. He captured his sightings and impressions in perspectival snapshots, re-presentations of the three-dimensional occurrences.

The dimensions of the meanwhile sedimented occurrence exceed the bounds of what an individual person might possibly be able to fathom. Even factual descriptions such as "a part of Turtle Mountain spanning 1,000 × 425 × 150 metres broke and slid in about 100 seconds across the valley floor" defies the human power of imagination, not to mention the existential dimension of the geological catastrophe: the human being, who is tiny in relation



#7 The Frank Slide Show



#1 The Frank Slide Show

to a massif, is literally “shaken off”. It is fortunate that only the relicts of this catastrophic event appear before our eyes. Might we still retain an impression of this – and yet still recognize the earth before it collapses above our heads?

It might be plausible to assume that the spatialisation of both the pictorial motifs and the pictorial narrative and its perspectivation for a viewer, which began to emerge in the realm of art in the late Middle Ages, sprang forth from the increasing cultivation and investigation of the alpine world. The sweeping view that a high mountain offered during its ascent was most likely experienced for the first time in the latter decades of the fourteenth century by scholars, who previously – metaphorically speaking – were only familiar with the downward gaze, as adopted when reading and duplicating books. In this sense, Francesco Petrarca’s legendary ascent of Mont Ventoux in April 1336 was a pioneering feat.

The Renaissance introduced the invention of the central perspective, an individual point of view defining the conception of what was perceived. This, in turn, also represented the initialisation of the notion of the “landscape”, which was accompanied by a new understanding of the domination and civilisation of unrestrained nature. This simultaneously marks the beginning of the division of universal science into an array of different disciplines, including the natural sciences. If today the fields of geology, engineering surveys, and geomorphology are responsible for the investigation of landslides, Schwander approaches this subject with the very recent discipline of artistic research.

*Stones, fractures, edges, horizontal cuts. Pebbles, slopes, piles, and material surfaces. Perspectival planes, detritus, and aggregate, boulders or individual blades of mountain grass.*

Black-and-white photocopied fragments of a landscape expand into compositions of fantastic pictorial formations. These comprise a sum total of the specific: next to the flint, the slab is situated, upon which slip rock spreads out and in the midst of which a boulder opens up to the escarpment that appears to support groups of stones of various sizes, types, and forms. But no, these are in fact cut into or glued onto the base.

inventory of identifiable types of material, both rock and earth sedimentations, are brought to light. Simultaneously, the image of a historically evolved order is disrupted while its elements intermingle and in turn are sedimented: its form of manifestation is disintegration.

Markus Schwander counters this process literally: in the associative conjoining of “rock” material that strikes the eye.

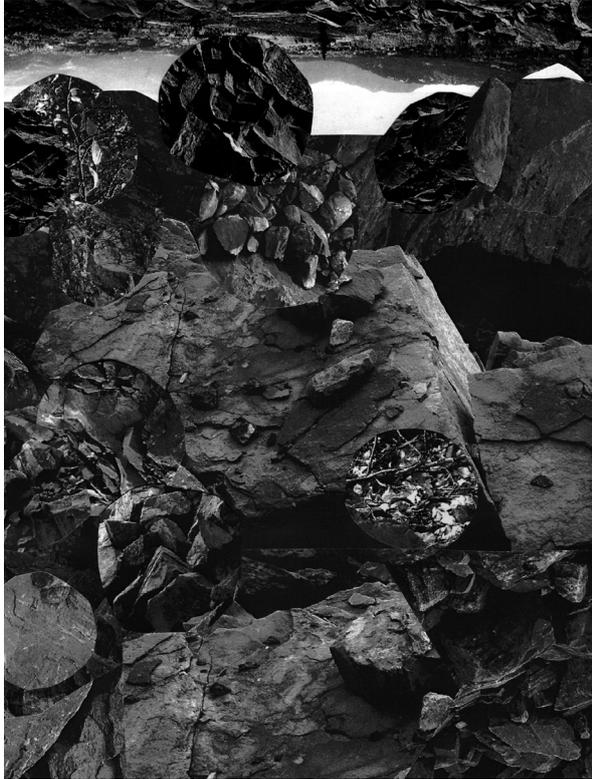


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The rock is Markus Schwander’s focal subject: the fractured, particular, interconnected, and refractive event of photographic rock depiction. In the individual pictorial works of the artist, vast quantities, one might say convolutes of rock material, are conjoined; they accumulate into expanses of highly diverse co-ordinations of dimensions, formal variations, and perspectival presentations. The landslide is a natural historical incident of landscape transformation; a specific, violently triggered reshaping of the material and surface of our natural environment and thus of our field of vision that renders the perception of a “landscape”. In the wake of a landslide, the

Each pictorial work turns out differently and hence is “unpredictable”, as the artist describes the development of his collages. Usually first pinning these to the walls of his studio, he plays through various combinations of the assembled photos. Bit by bit, sometimes interrupted by longer phases of discontinuation, the composition organically gains shape. It is a reaction to the original form, a balancing out of the possibilities of a subsequent, expanding formation. Schwander cuts the photocopies to size, adding individual motifs or entire areas of landscape or gluing these on top of one another. If a modern pictorial composition traditionally evolves with regard to

its format and its boundaries, the tension in this case arises from the expanding or compressing interrelationships of the individual pictorial elements in relation to one another.<sup>3</sup> The autonomy of each new landscape concept proves itself even in its final mounting as a framed picture at the point where transgressions or incongruences ver-



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sus the rectangle of the picture are generously left blank as “empty” spaces. Markus Schwander submits to the formal language of the respective forms his subjects call for. These are component parts, possibilities of formations – regardless of a realistic or unique, singular composition.

It is surprising that the heavy rock that dominates the centre of the picture does not pull the picture’s weight downwards; it is possible to follow the angular, grooved surface of the amply familiar material with a watchful gaze. The corporeality contrasts with the volume; the mass is challenged by the form it takes. Of course, the picture is located on paper and a photograph denotes what is absent. It is a snapshot of a visual surface – but of what exactly? Which boundaries does Schwander draw between cutting along the contours of the rock, or cutting into the stony,

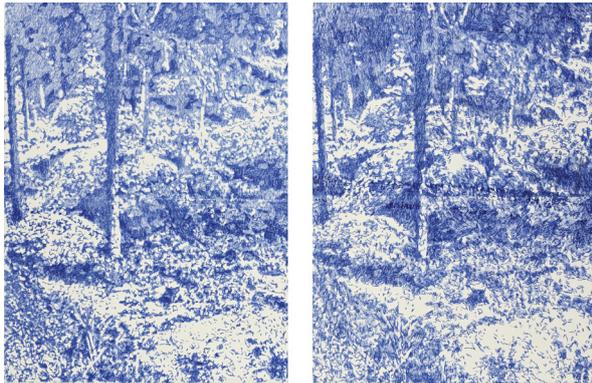
then again spatialising landscape? In other words, what type of transgression confronts us?

Choreographies are underway here in which the recipient has no place. If one enters into a contemplation of what is visually perceivable in a deciphering mode, there will be no solid ground upon which to set foot. The motif of the veil of mist that indicates an illusory depth in the centre of the picture – might this not be seen as a primeval gap in the realm of rocks? – playfully leads back to concrete, rotating fragments of fog that are cut into the shapes of flower petals. The motifs are placed side by side as well as into each other. In some of the collages they co-structure the picture as ornaments of mostly rotating cut-out forms. One partially perceives the incisions; in other cases, the transgression into another “point of view” or “point of you” only manifests itself retrospectively. Caught up in the density? Imprisoned in the interrelationships between the phenomena? To escape the sensation of vertigo, the pictorial massif that might even from a frontal perspective plant itself before the viewer’s eyes, one might hold onto the cut-up picture, onto its manner of composition as well as onto its role that performs all modes of positing, to catch up with the image of the landslide.

*The quasi-chaotic, random overproduction of paper/subject material at the copying machine. Markus Schwander’s studio becomes a paper quarry. Again and again the artist welds two pictures into one, reduplicating these to create a new template for further processing.*

The starting point was photographs that Markus Schwander took at various sites of landslides. In the meantime, he almost exclusively uses reproductions for his collages. Reproductions – in this case, these are photocopies – consistently manifest the same motif, again and again reduplicating the same depiction, the representations of the rock induced to fall by inconceivable motion. And each time when the artist sends a further image through the copying machine, it changes at least minimally. It loses in definition or gains in contrast. The

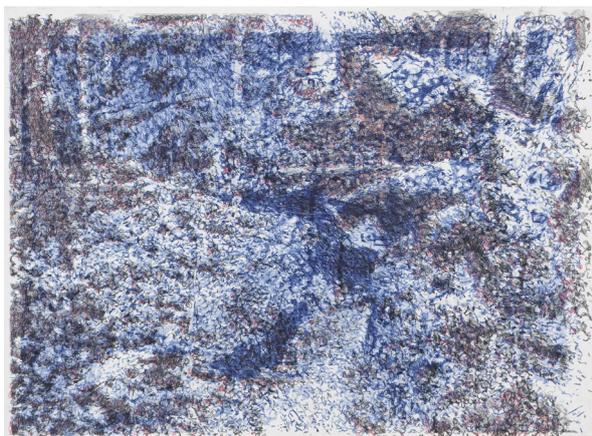
copies are of varying quality; the colours are nuanced. Varying paper qualities also have an impact on the duplications of the motif. Parts of the already complete collages enter into the motif convolute of the landslide and are deposited as temporal levels in the narrative history and development of the motifs of the individual collages. Schwander does not obscure their status as working material, their “emergence



Goldau vorher - nachher No.1

into a picture”. Here one still perceives the traces of adhesive tape, which was used as a replacement for glue; there one and the same rock unexpectedly repeats itself.

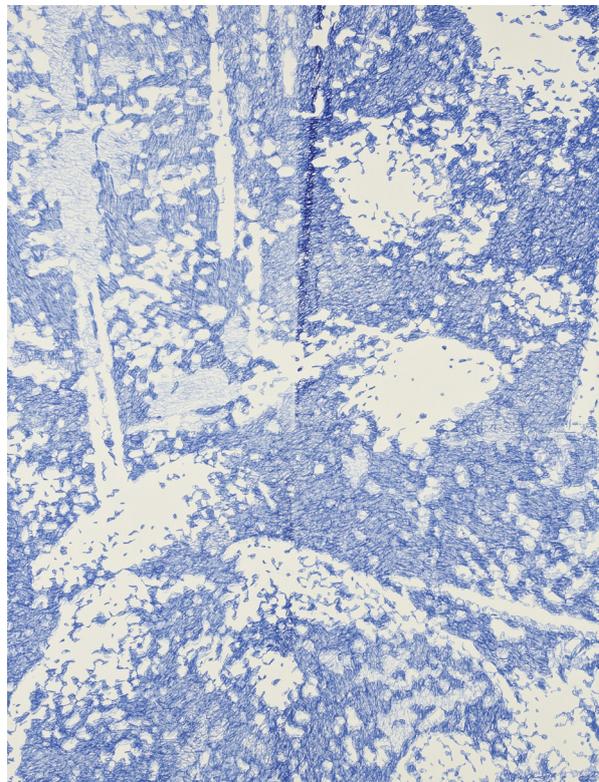
For presentations Markus Schwander prints out the photographed collages. The original sources of individual collages – his landslide relicts – are stored in his studio as material for further reference; it is still unclear how these will be used.



Goldau vorher - nachher No.19

The work series *Goldau vorher – nachher* proposes a different investigation of a further site of a landslide occurrence: the landslide of *Goldau* in the year 1806 belongs to the geologically more recent landslides,

drawing a large measure of attention beyond the boundaries of Switzerland due to the then new methods of reproduction provided by the woodcut. It thus subsequently gained currency as a motif in theatre leaflets, among other media, which depicted the landscape panorama before and after the slide. The dyadic reversible picture presents a first medial “repetition” of the occurrence of the landslide in a before/after dynamic. Schwander addresses Goldau in photographs of the site of the occurrence that has in the meantime become overgrown with trees. Here, he forgoes mechanical reproduction of the images, instead tracing the imagery of views into the forest and underbrush in the technique of “blindly” copying it by hand. Dense foliage and undergrowth create the formal grid that obstructs the view, and Schwander condenses this process as if it were dynamised. In these works, the impressionist lightness of a sensory perception before its factual solidification into a picture is retained through the careful sedimentation of



Goldau vorher - nachher No.8

partial and quasi-unintentional imprints of abstract surface formations. The movement and irregularity of the handwriting, the surface structure of the paper that is rendered

in the tracing as well, and the repetition of the ornamental cuts as well as of blue, white or red-and-black mottled particles of colour bring forth an oscillating site of pictorial events. In cases where a subject is transferred via imprint, this results in motifs that evoke the spread of vegetation and overgrowth. And once again the notion of the unique picture is called into question, just as this is revealed and conveyed to us by the dynamic of the landscape that we experience as three-dimensional. The many pictorial constellations elicit the understand-

existential disruption of 9/11, the collapse of concrete whose silhouette had been constructed by human hands before it became an icon of the ultimate downfall. The mountain before the landslide: if one regards its outlines, these are precisely not imperturbable but rather always potentially subject to extreme transformation. The historical landslide represents a wound. On site, the (earthen) material has newly manifested itself and has again become visible. The incident of the landslide has become sedimented and overgrown.



Flimsetüde #11

ding that the picture takes shape through a process of imaginative perception.

Might thus the avalanche be seen as the sculptural artwork per se? The question is not new, yet for our generation the question of the degree of a possible “co-experience” of precipitation arises anew – for instance, in view of the catastrophic,

Markus Schwander’s work is physical, a collection and substantial imagination of new constellations with the pictorial material that the fallen mountain presents to us. We follow its downfall in the labyrinth of fissures and the hasty leap to the next foothold, the next rock – and across the rock plateau. This is not a space that one

can enter, although it alone consists of spatial elements. There is no point of rest for the eye, which must remain in constant movement and take a jump into the picture. In exploring the occurrence of the landslide, the artist undertakes the daring venture of an existential overextension, for the contemplation of which he makes available choreographies of deserted formations to us on the pages of his publication.

In an interview in 2014 the philosopher Alain Badiou defined the phenomenon of the encounter as a contingent, chance element of existence: “Something happens to you that nothing among your existing world’s points of reference made likely or necessary. [...] Since the encounter is incalculable, if you try to reduce this insecurity then you destroy the encounter itself.”<sup>4</sup>

Translation Belinda Grace Gardner

- 1 Site investigations of the landslides of Goldau and Flims (for instance, through joint investigations as a research team and the utilisation of group hikes in discussions, pictorial representations, and exhibitions) remain a constant in collaborative projects as well.
- 2 Cited after Snjezana Mihalic Arbanas (University of Zagreb, Croatia) and Zeljko Arbanas (University of Rijeka, Croatia), “Landslides: A Guide to Researching Landslide Phenomena and Processes” (abstract), from: Handbook of Research on Advancements in Environmental Engineering (2015), <http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/landslides/122644> (19/11/2016).
- 3 Here those parts of the pictorial elements that have been pasted over also play a role of their own, allowing the viewer to imagine the continuation of the fragments that are no longer visible.
- 4 Quoted from an interview with Alain Badiou by Clement Petitjean, “People cling onto identities ... it is a world opposed to the encounter”, 14 April 2014, transl. from the French into English by David Broder, Verso Books blog: <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1557-alain-badiou-people-cling-onto-identities-it-is-a-world-opposed-to-the-encounter> (27/11/2016).



Flimsetüde #20



Flimsetüde #16