

Bodenmomente

From a futurologist's perspective, one thing is certain: at some point, probably many years from now, the Zeche Auguste Victoria coal mine in Marl will be opened once again. We don't know why, or what our descendants will be looking for, but judging by the course of history so far, we can be sure that someone, for one reason or another, will be drawn to explore the hollowed-out depths we have left behind.

In 2015, just two weeks before the mine was closed for good and placed in a state of indefinite slumber, artist Antonia Low made a series of casts of the mine's floor. On level 4, at 886 meter's depth, she spread layers of latex across four sections of the floor's surface to produce a set of molds, capturing traces of human mining work as well as signs of geological processes. The resulting sculptural documents bear the imprint of rail tracks and left-over debris such as plastic bags, chains and screws, as well as organically shaped stalagmites caused by the cumulative crystallization of dripping saline.

The wealth of information captured in the casts about the site where they were made, appears too complex and arbitrary for the human eye to make sense of. Presented to us with no other narrative than the place and time of their making, they are reminiscent of archaeological objects or forensic evidence yet to be deciphered. Poised between the concretely matter-of-fact and utterly incomprehensible, the sculptures enigmatically suggest they might contain a number of important answers – if only we knew with which questions to interrogate them. This mute promise of prospective readability lends them an air of bypassing the present, speaking of an absent past to a yet unknowable future.

As the title suggests, *Bodenmomente* (roughly translatable as “floor moments”) is indeed a work about time. The almost photographic, snap-shot like, process of physically capturing the surface of the mine's floor just before it will be hidden from view for time foreseeable, is counterpointed in the making of the casts with the use of ground, million-year-old, natural stone and muscovite. Thus, human and geological time are compressed and equalized into one visual plane. But the ‘momente’ of the title might also allude to the idea of a maneuver, such as a step in a working process or specific procedure, suggesting a process of transformation. Considering past works by Low, where she has photographed hidden spaces in public institutions, revealing the infrastructure or history behind that which usually comes into view, such a reading does not seem entirely out of place.

When hung on the walls of the Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten, located directly above the mine they bare record of, the floor casts are transformed from working surfaces into cultural artefacts. Assigning an otherwise overlooked part of the mine with cultural value, Low sends her casts on a similar value adding journey – from the unseen interior of the Earth to the spectacle of human civilization – as the tons of coal previously hoisted out of the Zeche Auguste Victoria when the mine was still operating.

Today, the era of fossil fuels is said to be coming to an end. But the extractive paradigm nevertheless continues to advance, progressing into outer space and down into the deep-sea floor in its incessant search for Rare Earth minerals and other resources. In addition, the digital age has opened up new extractive frontiers, exemplified by data mining as well as mining of digital currencies such as Bitcoin. Looked at with a gaze conditioned by the digital age, the excess of information available in Low's *Bodenmomente* is similar to the raw data found in the depths of the World Wide Web, collected briefly and blindly to later serve as the basis for detailed analysis and processing.

Our contemporary obsession with the digital makes it easy to forget that a lot of what we know of the human past has been gleaned from art works and other material traces, and

that this will probably be the case also in relation to our own epoch. As we are caught in endless streams of fleeting information, it is worth reminding ourselves that when our time eventually comes to an end, we will most likely not be survived by our data but by the billions of tons of plastic and other indestructible materials we have used to encase it. From this perspective, it seems quite plausible that Low's Bodenmomente could one day act as maps for explorers braving the flooded tunnels of the Zeche Auguste Victoria mine. Or, at the very least, as a message in a bottle, lodged inside the future ruins of the museum with a message of what remains just below it.

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