

Martin Jaeggi on:

Linda Herzog

Mihriban

2004 – 2007

For Linda Herzog, the camera is an instrument for the charting of reality. With it she investigates cities and localities, landscapes and countries, the sheer indivisible diversity and contradictoriness of which she tries to dissect in images. However, engaging with the reality of these places also always means engaging with both the camera's potential and the shortcomings when depicting reality, and is thus always an exploration of the medium. Linda Herzog's work derives its concision from the tension inherent in this dual dynamic.

Linda Herzog has been living in Istanbul since 2004 and using the city as her base, has travelled the length and breadth of Turkey. The photographs taken on these journeys form the basic stock for photographic essay currently in progress in book format, entitled »Mihriban«. »Mihriban« is a Turkish girl's name and means »good friend, with a good heart and a laughing face«; above all, »Mihriban« is a well-known love song in Turkey.

Herzog utilizes the most varied photographic genres in her investigation of Turkey – from landscapes and cityscapes to images of specific situations and even portraits. In the changing interplay of close-ups and distance shots, nature and culture, groups and individuals, she is able to conjure up an image of Turkey beyond common preconceptions and clichés. Herzog's photographs don't attempt to explain, instead they depict Turkey's both unexpected and unsuspected *alienness* in images that are fascinating because they pose more questions than they answer. These are the traces of Herzog's exploration of Turkey, testimony to her search which has brought the country closer to her, but at the same time has rendered it alien, foreign. Like any alert traveller, she manages to capture in her pictures the fact that the substance of a locality lies perhaps precisely in that indecipherable otherness, in that subtlety of everyday life, which comes into view when those strident, superficial differences have lost their appeal.

In her book *Istanbul, Birmingham, Zürich* published in 2005, she used the medium of juxtaposition to circumscribe an abstract conceptual horizon when capturing these places and the differing lifestyles, which typify them. In her most recent work she dispenses with the explanatory rhetoric of juxtaposition and illustrates instead the palpably inconceivable nature of an alien culture.

Herzog never falls prey to the touristic charm of the merely exotic, but instead puts her finger on those differences, which might generate a political dimension. The questions raised by Herzog's pictures about Turkey are certainly controversial. They point to themes such as Islamicism and whether Turkey does or does belong to the West and the European Union, which will also be decisive for the future of Switzerland and Europe in the coming years. Whatever is to happen in the bridgehead between the Occident and the Orient will also have an impact upon our lives. However puzzling the picture of Turkey seems to be in Linda Herzog's images, the questions raised are nonetheless questions regarding our own future. Herzog's images are also, and perhaps precisely so, a call to this long-overdue, well-repressed engagement.