

## Michael Schäfer

### *Champ*

01.09 – 06.10.2007

Les Acteurs, 2007, 26 dig. c-print, 109 x 80 cm, ed. 3+1 a.p

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In his large-scale photographic work of the past years Michael Schäfer has focused explicitly on the mechanisms of the ubiquitous media apparatus. He has taken up found media footage extracting single subjects by means of reconstruction or modified staging and set it into an artistic context. Wholly staged, constructed and digitally processed in an elaborate way they have obtained by fraud our confidence quoting medial codes and their respective iconography. Serving as archetype and projection screen at the same time, it is less the factual background of a picture that is relevant but rather the perceived psychological content of the depicted scenery.

For his exhibition *Champ* Michael Schäfer has developed a series of – at first sight – classical ‘portraits’. He follows consequently the digital techniques introduced in former series and simultaneously extends his approach by having the phenomenon of collective memory encounter personal interpretation of traditional role models.

For the shooting selected students of an elite boarding school put themselves into the situation of a manager at work who is supposed to be depicted in a preferably representative posture as if for an interview or the annual business report. It is however left to the ‘actors’ in how far they pose in an individual way or revert to poses ingrained in the collective social memory.

Recurring writing utensils such as fountain pen and blotting pad underline the seemingly objective but highly fictitious character of the portraits. The light hits the depicted persons from the front and is evocative of the confronting spotlights of a press conference. Therewith the staginess and overly present directness of the adopted posture especially emerges, and yet the poses themselves surprise: paradoxically, they seem very traditional and in their displayed severity almost old-fashioned. The entrenched mechanisms of (self-)representation seem to be a heavy load to carry for some of the students whereas to others it appears to be the self-evident property of a young elite. Although highly constructed, the pictures live from their ambivalence between artificiality and sensible authenticity of the single characters.

Yet, Schäfer distances himself clearly from classical approaches in portrait photography, because the intended fading between the graduates’ future social role and actual situation of life leads to a subtle deferment of the image content. He is not interested in the depicted person as individual but in the taken posture that has a certain impact on the spectator (or within society) as a traditional and codified role model.

The spectator in his classical role is further irritated by the concept of the room for Michael Schäfer’s exhibition ‘Champ’: the images are hanged on all gallery walls higher than usually, similar to an ancestral portrait gallery. In opposition to it, the entire floor is covered with suit jackets. This ‘carpet’ adheres a human connotation and one seems to walk inevitably on the ‘back’ of a preceding generation, whereupon every step must be set carefully.

These two levels reveal a social field where a secure stand is not necessarily granted and social differences or differentiations exist noticeably.