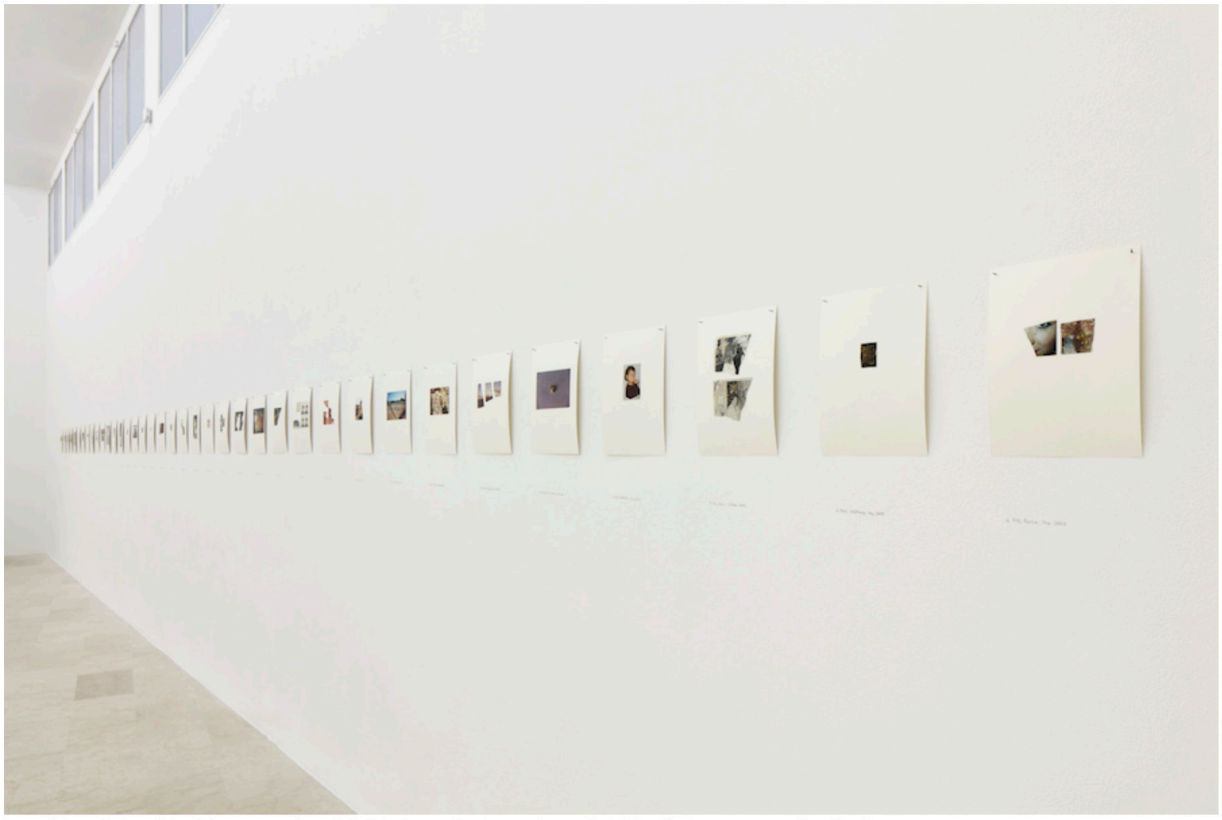
ATP
DIARY

Joachim Schmid. Photoworks | Gallery P420, Bologna

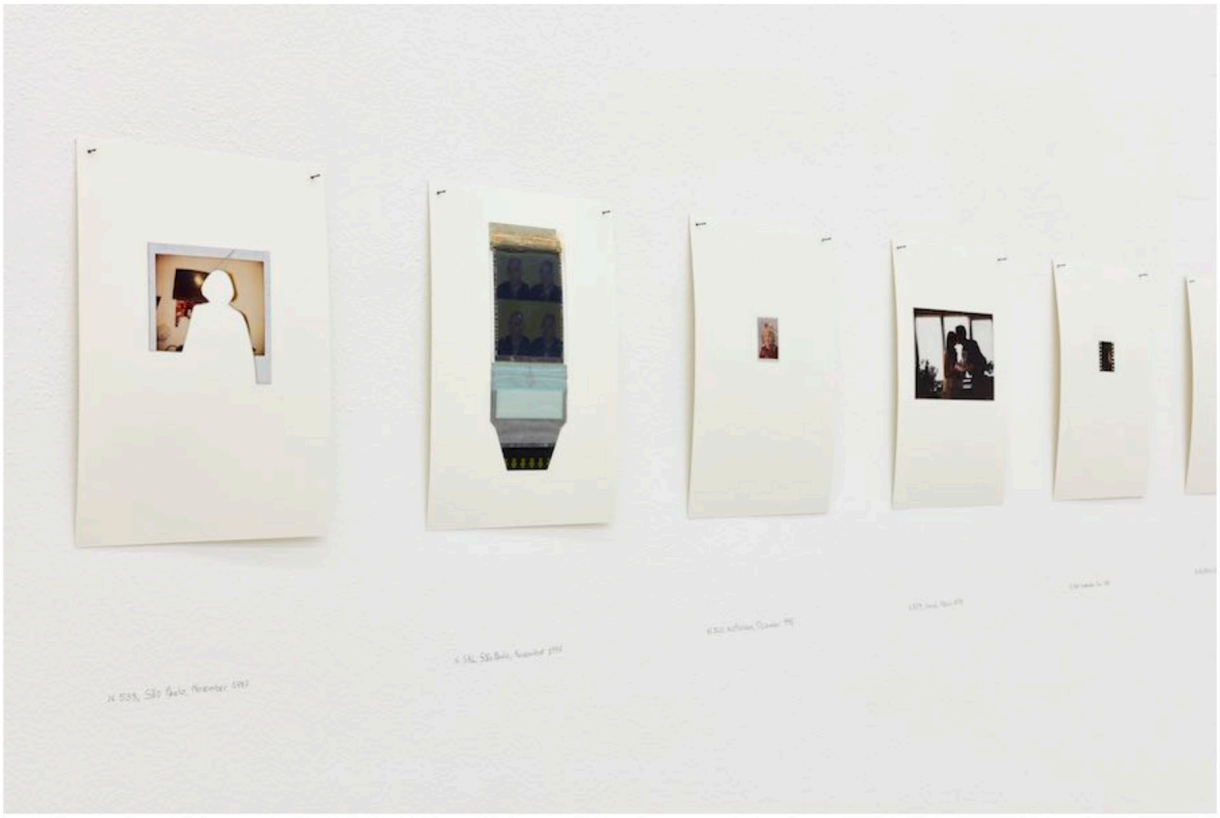
Regardless of the interpretative process referred to the images and subjects present in the *photo trouvée* and of all the readings that may follow, **Joachim Schmid**'s poetics of reuse is also above all an ethical choice, a reference and an invitation to a sort of retraction with respect to the incontinent flow of shots that are produced and circulated every day in the society dominated by photographic telephony and the promises of visibility of social networks. In the current exhibition at the **P420 Gallery** (from January 26th to March 6th, 2021), the German artist examines the "chance factor", which is one of the most interesting and enigmatic aspects when wandering around flea markets and finding something. Then the chance encounter sets into action connections of meaning and reinterpretations, triggers other dynamics, drifts and directions. The *photo trouvées* are reconsidered and endowed with an "other" aura, even though they are contained in a device that calls into question the notions of work, author and collection.

In order to put back into action images that have been dispersed or sent to the rubble, it is necessary to set up devices capable of conducting photographic memory. Schmid's operation induces us to extend the possibilities of the gaze, to leave behind a uniquely individual existence in order to imagine other recoveries and conceptual extensions. In this opening, the copious material of anonymity swarms: individuals (mostly no longer alive or forgotten), objects, places, dates, notes, feelings, emotions, unspoken things. It is interesting to observe in this experience above all the "mass subject", the set of unidentifiable presences that unites everyone, something that also acts as a mirror in which to fall in order to recognize oneself through personal projections. Schmid triggers in his combinatory machine the devices of repetition of previous things, continuously developing a capacity for reproposition, aggregation and development. I am reminded, to give a practical example, of Melville's use of something that was already present in the Bible or Greek tragedy to make something more expansive resonate in the plot of Moby Dick. Through his anodyne photographs, the German artist brings to life the sense of fragility, the unexpected appearances, the gaze that is surprised to find familiar evocations, the intimate preciousness of weekdays, the ungrammatical reminiscences of nostalgia, the vacillations, indecisions, mistakes, blurs, in short, a range of possibilities that has rarely been considered by art history, cinema, and art photography.

As has been underlined by critics on several occasions, the choice of not using the camera and suspending the production of other images has shifted the action towards other declensions of making, that is, towards the research, collection and reuse of already existing photographs taken by others, found in flea markets, in archives, or images downloaded from the web. This gesture also contains a metaphor that would have appealed to Bartleby – the apostle of self-denial – and to those who distance themselves from "too much" and from "too much". Schmid is close to the sensibility of Melville's anti-hero, to the rejection of futile overabundance. He adheres to Montaigne's motto: "Je m'abstiens" (I abstain). He refuses to compromise. His choice not to photograph opens up a series of negations or something that is constructed in the negative (I am referring to a mode that is close to negative theology, that is, to those who wish to evoke the divine through words and phrases constructed to emphasize what God is not). It puts two movements into action at the same time, on the one hand the one in levare, that is the choice not to take any more photographs and not to contribute to the overproduction of photographic shots, and on the other hand the one that collects by continuous addition new found images. We are not faced with a contradiction, but rather with a well-conceived short-circuit. This opens up collateral effects, symbolic diagnoses, countless internal stories, metalanguage, conceptual hypertexts, latent images, continuous questions, and more. What resonates in Schmid's devices, in his collections of vernacular photographs and images taken from the internet? What branches out from his private pessimism? What takes shape from arranging inhomogeneous sources (of photographs, figurines, posters, postcards, etc.) that come from countless other lives?



Joachim Schmid, Photoworks, 2021, installation view, P420, Bologna – ph. C. Favero



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Schmid's works are expandable to ever new narratives, between vernacular realism and fiction. What narratives, reinterpretations or interpretations come to life from photographs that come from family albums or from images uploaded by millions on Instagram or Flickr? In the photographs rescued from the scrap heap or from oblivion, especially those reassembled after having been torn to pieces by the previous owner, there is at the same time something that smacks of a short circuit, like something that goes from one moment to the next from comedy to tragedy, or vice versa. Schmid makes us experience the tragic nature of his photo trouvées in an ironic way, he shows the unexpected, the suspension of all judgment, the conceptual suspense.

The first room of the gallery displays works from different periods: *Zur Theorie der Fotografie* (1986), Statics (1995-1996), *Meetings* (2003-2007), *The Artist's Model* (2016), *R.Flick Collection* (2017), *Il Mare* (2019). In the second room is the large installation of *Bilder von der Strasse* (1982-2012) and the video projection of the 1000 images found over thirty years, revealing a series of useful attempts in the exercise of observation and deciphering.

The ways in which images are received are linked to the interpretative schemes that, at a given moment in history, guide the reactions of observers. It is necessary to keep in mind that these interpretative schemes and the canons that guide reception also have an effect on those who create a work, that is, these data influence the ways in which the artist constructs his images. Linguistic and visual dimensions coexist both within and beyond each cultural category. Iconological memory and the art of memory have always been related to the history of reading and writing, to orality and to the ways of assimilating texts, within a res that crosses times and generations. Does the mental process that also leaves traces in the body, the memory techniques of classical rhetoric, the creation of maps of places, the inner location of texts read or felt come into play in the relationship with the fruition of images? The literary material and the corpus of images recorded in memory are the means to move new associations of meaning, other thoughts and intuitions. We find ourselves in front of an open work, which foresees a continuous change in relation to those who enter into the game of interpretation. It is clear that in such a relationship the reception of the spectator, of the reader, of the active user is decisive. Joachim Schmid has succeeded in unhinging the false certainties of those who, in the act of interpreting a work of art, have always followed three basic rules: a) all the pieces of the puzzle, that is, all the photo trouvées with the relevant iconographic elements, must fit together and leave no gaps in the unitary vision; b) the pieces must compose a coherent design; c) all things being equal, the interpretation that implies the fewest hypotheses must generally be considered the most probable. Thus, the allegorical game requires a great deal of time and effort for the practice of deciphering, but it has the ability to imprint itself deeply in the memory and to generate pleasure when one succeeds in the enterprise of creating illuminating connections of meaning. Like a Mercury acting in a time and civilization addicted to the ever-increasing proliferation of images, Schmid finds and puts back into action visual messages to be delivered to those who prefer to take a step back before taking a long leap forward.

8 Joachim Schmid, Meetings, 2003-2007, 12 stampe ad inchiostro pigmentato, cm.30×40 cad., foglio cm.40×50 cad. 12 pigment ink prints, cm.30×40 each, paper cm.40×50 each, ed.3+1AP (3_3), particolare – detail, Courtesy l'artista, the artist & P420