

**DEAD END  
MILES COOLIDGE**

Gallery Lisa Ruyter, Vienna, 5.3 ^ 8.5.2004  
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(Translated by Segolen Koschu)

The last time I stood in front of a drawbridge was years ago. We were on our way to go on vacation, somewhere in a wide, flat landscape. I still remember how the street suddenly raised up in front of me, leaving me standing in front of a colossal wall. I looked curiously for the other shore/side as the bridge was lowered and I, after my visual image was complete again, drove off into the landscape with a triumphant feeling and childish excitement. It was a pretty surreal spatial experience, simultaneously supported by the presence and absence of the other side/shore.

In the same way, Miles Coolidge's images receive their meaning through the knowledge of the other (invisible) side. The photographs, which are presently shown at the Lisa Ruyter Gallery, were all taken in the US state of Florida. At first I didn't understand what one could see on the images, in itself absurd, because naturally, a photographic image contains information on its entire surface. But those images are somehow impenetrable; they lack any perspective that would allow the viewer's eye to find some orientation, and to decipher its possible meaning. Monolithic, metallic constructions, products of industrialization, take over the entire surface of the image - devoid of any context, those objects appear without purpose, still waiting for their particular destiny. For a long time the expression "unintentional sculpture" comes to mind, as coined by Bernd and Hilla Becher. It is only after a more in depth viewing of the images that I can correct my mistaken impression and understand that the photographs represent drawbridges. Pulled up grids, which find their way to the edge of the frame and don't allow for any experience of depth, but stay formally self-contained. Because the drawbridges only describe a moment that refers to another moment, proverbially, "there is more behind it" - that there has to be more behind it! - than being a pure document of a not uninteresting, architectural construct in regard to the archeology of industry.

Miles Coolidge, who lives in Los Angeles, aligns his work with conceptualism. His critical photo-documentations emphasize that his work has its place in the history of social documentary, whose most important representatives are artists such as Walker Evans, Ed Ruscha or Allen Sekula. Coolidge explores the semantic possibilities of the photographic image as he works with the language of the particular location. In this context the *Drawbridges* are a perfect example, because they expose photography's inherent ambiguity of presence and absence of the subject and object. In his photographs the artist "works out of photography's underlying principle of the absence and presence of object and subject and where the ever-present visual wealth of the image, structurally builds on the omission of the actual referent" (Nadja Rottner about Miles Coolidge in *Camera Austria* Nr. 76/2001, s. 3 - 15). Coolidge's work therefore, despite his superficially neutral and objective image content, is always inscribed with a subtext, that points to another shore/side. His series *Mattawa* (2000), photographs about housing projects for migrant farm workers, shows how all-real life atmosphere is drowned out by an excess of technical administrative operations and communicates the same thing as his series *Mounds* that he began in 1997. *Mounds* refers to prehistoric burial grounds, whose ritual nature has been integrated or more precisely, has been entirely absorbed into the landscape design of golf courses, pointing to "the founding years of American identity, where the oppression and devaluation of American Indian heritage took deep roots." (Nadja Rottner, *ibid.*), or as in this case *Drawbridges*, DEAD END.

The drawbridges are snapshots in the truest sense, because it is a temporary condition that is being documented: Just for a moment monumental industrial creations thrust themselves in front of the typical bourgeois and (allegedly) idyllic Floridian suburbs, overshadowing their social reality. Then as the bridge is lowered, the monolith melts back into the street and a perspective, that is a very different spatial reality and one that points to a specific social situation, is reopened.

Gallery Lisa Ruyter is an addition to the wealth of exhibition spaces around Schleifmuehl ^ and Eschenbachgasse in Vienna, which have opened or reopened in the last 5 years. Artist Lisa Ruyter - who is represented as a painter by Georg Kargl, whose gallery is just around the corner ^ opened last fall with a show by Brice Dellsberger and impresses since then in her beautiful and compact space with self-contained exhibitions by contemporary artist such as Justine Kurland, Katherine Bernhardt and soon Benjamin Butler. Miles Coolidge is yet another great choice.