

Josef Klammer

self-portrait with webcam

Josef Klammer immerses life into a “digital bath”¹ in which it's soaked and saturated before coming out analog. That can be interpreted as a chemical metaphor, and as an evocation of a filtration or cleansing process as well. Ultimately, this isn't a matter of duplicating what's already there, but rather of tension and interactivity between systems, which lead in turn to new definitions. Often, audio traces are what emerge from the apparatuses; this time it's images. In his 1993 work *Telay* in which a percussion piece was telephoned around the world, he already began making use of large-scale systems: a satellite as a special effects device that's as complex as it is costly. Briefly express your gratitude before getting on with expressing yourself. Klammer uses highly complex systems and their technical standards as welcome special effects processors and reveals thereby just how thin-skinned these extremely sophisticated systems and their mythic constructions really are. This use of high-tech in ways other than those for which it was intended is a cool, calm and collected way to defuse the weapon of technology, and provides a way of dealing with the objects onto which people cast their projections in a way that is down to earth and rooted to local facts and circumstances.

In 2004, his first webcam self-portrait appeared as a postcard in the Edition Werkstatt Graz. For Ars Electronica 2007, he's now gone on a little outing: analog network meets digital network. Just like everywhere else in the world, a host of webcams have been set up in public spaces all over Austria too. Some deliver images that are so sharp you can almost read the print on a sidewalk café menu. Klammer, his trusty laptop at the ready, takes up position before such a device and captures beautiful images of himself. It's pure impudence to simply butt in here and say: “This now belongs to me.” But this sort of intervention in complex, public scenarios takes place in an unspectacular way: simply use the system along with all of the fluctuations and fuzziness it gives rise to. This isn't a matter of creating a suitable *mise en scène* for an artist's ego; anyone could sit and pose for these cameras. This is Klammer's contradictory answer to the great Western tradition of the self-portrait, a response totally lacking in the expected pomp and melodrama and one that transfers this genre into the zone of friction between the public and private spheres. The representation, on the other hand, takes place in a way that is as explicitly cozy as it is auratic. There are 10 photos on handmade paper of superb quality, framed classically in oak, displayed in a serene-romantic situation. The technology remains hidden during this excursion into the family portrait gallery. In addition, there's a series of postcards meant to reendow the project with some of its public-touristic character. Send one to your loved ones who aren't online!

Translated from German by Mel Greenwald

¹ In his 1995 project *ADA*, Josef Klammer used “digital bath” to refer to processes in digital systems after analog inputs and before analog outputs.



Josef Klammer, *self portrait with web-cam*, 2004, Postcard A5, Werkstatt Graz Edition