

SLIDE

Text by Cristian Nae

SLIDE analyzes the virtues and limitations of an already obsolete photographic technology – projection by using a carousel slide projector. Through this new project, Matei Bejenaru approaches photography as a sculptural object: the sound of the carousel, its spatial presence and the monumental size of the images, all combine to offer the viewer the sensory experience of a haptic gaze. Despite the seduction that the monumental images exert through their special clarity and immersive character, SLIDE does not only reveal the formal qualities of the image, but aims, in the terms proposed by Rosalind Krauss, to expose the parameters that define the specifics of the photographic act itself. The artist stages a rigorous and at the same time poetic exercise of conceptual analysis that aims to thematize both the technology of analog photography ("device" or "camera", in Foucauldian terms), the limitations it exerts on the gaze as a way of a sensitive, experiential knowing of the world, as well as its specific language elements. SLIDE is also an exercise of perceptual "unlearning" and a meditation on the resources of knowledge provided by an image reproduction technology, whose history is confused with Western artistic modernity, in an age dominated by the digital revolution.

The natural question that this sequence of images raises is not, therefore, what we look at, but *how* we look at it. With meticulousness and rigor, Matei Bejenaru articulates a laboratory of photography analysis, where photography is understood both as a phenomenological object and as a "theoretical object", described by authors such as Mieke Bal or Rosalind Krauss as a discursive form located in the field of contemporary visual culture besides other environments and artistic genres with which it communicates and intertwines. Evoking the vocabulary of retro-avant-garde, SLIDE dissects with a precision specific to the language of conceptual art the elements composing the camera, makes an inventory of photographic genres, framing and focusing techniques, chromatic spectrum, montage and geometric abstraction, which follow one another in a fake compressed history of analog photography. The viewer is thus engaged in an event that is equally didactic, poetic and performative, where the artist manages the projection devices and controls the time necessary for the gaze to get acquainted with its own photographic condition. Beyond its cultural dimension, Matei Bejenaru considers the photographic image is, also, a mystery: in some frames, surreal elements such as the black curtain discovered in the middle of the forest suggest that exploring the gaze is, for the artist, an exercise in subjectivization.