

Photographs and video recordings of a new, functional landscape, a highly processed setting, freeze-frames from a non-existing road movie, a diary of travel along a (lost) highway. Maciek Stępiński's N-113 is a visual story about a land of rapid communication, a world of transit, about places located between points A and B, i.e. it is a story about nowhere. Maciek created his films and photographs along the roads and highways of southern France, where he has been living for some time. N-113 denotes National Route 113, a road Stępiński often travels along himself.



Each time we take a trip, we first solve a canonical word problem by calculating the time required to travel from point A to point B. In contrast to most travelers, Maciek Stępiński is not at all interested in the beginning of a journey, its end, or the time required to travel a given distance. The artist focuses on the space that lies between points A and B, a space of modern

communication infrastructures, roads, signs, symbols, pictograms, warning lights and all manner of other encoded information directed to travelers. This world is filled with roadside warehouses, filling stations, large-format advertising, and finally, with those who control road traffic and render it safe. All these elements combine to constitute a complex system governed by its own set of rules. The system is functional, it serves the rapid and efficient transit of goods and people. We observe its elements, however, primarily when we are in motion, through the windows of speeding cars. Maciek Stępiński stops along his route to show us the immobility of communication infrastructures, to reveal their autonomous existence that seems independent of their function.

At first glance, Stępiński's works appear to be documents of a technologically processed landscape of roads and highways. This carefully managed landscape is populated by cars, machines and equipment used in maintaining roads in appropriate condition. The people who appear in his works inevitably do something associated with maintaining road traffic – they are police officers, traffic wardens, road workers. In uniform, they come across as just one more element of the vehicles and machines they operate; they become an integral part of the world of highways.



In Stępiński's works the functional rationalism of the world of road communication is replaced with the alienating feeling that underlies it. The documentary nature of his photos proves surface-deep and deceptive. If we look closely at his works, we might notice that heavy vehicles seem to levitate several centimeters above the ground, speeding cars have no license plates, places where there should be crowds of people milling around are instead deserted and left to be shaped by unmanned machinery. In some cases Stępiński has digitally processed his images, discreetly removing components, revealing sometimes surprising dimensions of situations that would otherwise seem banal.

In other works, there has been no intervention, but certain doubts remain. What does the abandoned roadside warehouse contain? What happened to the passengers of this automobile that lies in the



ditch? What is the function of these strange roadside machines with blinking warning lights? Where precisely is this bus going as it disappears into the dark? What actually happens in these places that we usually pass as we travel anywhere by car, too rapidly to examine them closely? Stępiński provides no answers to these questions; his road is like Lynch's lost highway: which instead of leading to a destination, it leads toward the disturbing mystery of the second, hidden face of things that seem obvious.

*N-113, lambda dibond 50x50 (1/5)*