

**Björn Behrens**  
Based on promise

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**What are your photographs currently about?**

On one hand my work is about the essential characteristics of photography that are staying in relation and against oneself; and there are the technical features such as light, perspective and abstraction. On the other hand, the content features why people take pictures, such as a proof of something. According to Susan Sontag, described in her book *On Photography*, photography gives people the imaginary possession of the past, a proof of existence and our desires caused by advertising photography.

With *Based on Truth* my idea is to indicate that we are all influenced by diverse theses of truth.

**Do you think the night is more truthful than the daytime? And what does that mean to you and to your work?**

It is true that I feel very alive at night. I work often at night even if I am not taking photographs. Also, the darkness plays a major role in my work. The orientation in the dark is difficult, it demands more focus, and I have to rely on my senses. It combines photography with viewing habits which we know from classical painting. In addition, the boundaries between staging and found images are obscured.

**On your photos light has a very dark mystic aura. Why did you choose these 5 light sources for your series called *Light*? I feel they all somehow belong to our darkest sides.**

I like your interpretation! This work is about reduction and thereby the following abstraction, which comes from the medium of photography itself. In this series of photos, I am concerned with the simultaneous attraction and

repulsion of diverse colored light sources. The series consists of five images. Each photographed object is producing light. An insect trap, a small plastic cross that is used in the southern countries in places where people have died, a Bengal fire which is used in football games, and a blue light that prevents to see the veins. These items are captured in medium format black and white negative. Then, I developed a single contact of each of these negatives by hand on a 30,5 cm x 24 cm Baritt paper. Later, the original negative is fixed on its own contact image. The original and the depicted image create together a straight angle of view a black square of 6 x 6 cm.

**It reminds me of Malevich's *Black Square*.**

Yes, however it can be described better with Hiroshi Sugimoto's portrait of Henry VIII and a work of Jimmie Durham. The court painter Hans Holbein around 1537 painted the King of England, based on this painting there is a wax sculpture at the Madame Tussaud and Sugimoto photographed the portrait of this life-like figure in the style of the Holbein painting. I am amazed that these three art mediums have bridged 500 years. With photography to awake the association of a painting is still great. In 1996, Jimmie Durham claimed he had poured an egg in a cement block. He describes this piece with the phrase *Do not open it before 2996*.

In this way he has created a 1000-year-old egg. In the series *Lights*, I liked that notion that everything that keeps the spectator from seeing behind the negative is that we collectively learned, art can not be touched, especially not the holy negative of the photographer. Also, I find it interesting to observe

the viewer by applying attraction and repulsion on him, which was also the initial idea by photographing these light sources. The viewer has a lot of different ways in which he uses his own experiences and his own imagination to make this work to learn.

**Why do you work with the exit light of the gallery?**

The images were taken at night by long exposure. The only source of light is the emergency exit light. In the series of empty spaces there are venues in which the images are exhibited later. The large-format photographs are printed on shiny photo paper. As a result, the viewer can see his own reflection on the images.

I like to observe the exhibition visitor in the space where the artwork is presented. After a while it becomes clear that the image they are looking at is part of the space in which they are located. This creates a shift in perception. This green light is always there, it is only a matter of light and time to recognize it.

**It is a bit scary to find your reflection in the empty version of the gallery space where you are standing at the moment, filled with images. It creates such a lonely feeling to me, especially with the title "*Based on Truth*".**

**Tell me about the NY series.**

**The theme is really grotesque.**

The pictures show the New York skylines. The images are stuck on a broken glass pane. These pieces were once on the front window of a small casino in a village in the north of Germany. I am fascinated by the thought that the owner of a casino has considered how to tempt people to play with money. These images are articulating the promise that if you win you can

finally get out of here.

**Is that, where the title *Based on Promise* comes from?**

The group of works from this exhibition called '*Based on Truth*'. Here I am engaged with the idea that photography claims the truth. *Based on Promise* that refer to the concept of what is behind the work. The concept consists of a description and the title, which occupies an important part of the work. The New York images were the first time I worked with found photographs.

**Björn Behrens**

(b. 1976 Bremen, Germany) was educated in Bremen where he received a diploma in fine arts. Behrens had solo shows in Bremen and Brussels also his photographs have been exhibited in numerous group exhibitions in Germany. *Based on Promise* is his first solo exhibition in Budapest, Hungary. This project includes three of his photo series, *NY* (2016), *Visible Light* (2014-2016) and *Based on Truth II* (2014 -2016).