

Words: Bram Van Beek

The images of Antwerp-based photographer Dries Segers seem inscrutable. Looking at them, the viewer feels disoriented. The only certainty they have, is that they are looking at photographs. And photographs are always images of something, they think, so they desperately search for recognizable forms and colours – anything that could provide meaning. The enigmatic title that accompanies the work isn't of any help either, and thus, the viewer has nothing but their own imagination to rely on. It is only when they stop trying to relate the images to the real world, and let go of their usual way of seeing, that they start to gain access to the work.

In an age when knowledge has taken over from wonder, Dries creates new and unfamiliar worlds that allow us to regain our original amazement. Driven by a fascination, or rather an obsession, with the photographic process, his worlds are the results of spontaneous and almost naïve experiments, which he conducts using the basic components of photography: light, time and photosensitive material. Nevertheless, it is not his aim to find a scientific explanation for his experiments, because “knowledge will always guide you in a certain way.” Dries wants to be surprised by the outcome and therefore withdraws himself from the process as much as possible: “I want to give the authorship back to photography itself. Photography created the image, not me. I'm its supporter”

In his last series, *Hits of Sunshine*, Dries pointed his camera at the sun, thus revealing the ambiguous relationship between photography and light. The work *Sunwriting*, for instance, shows the photographic potential of sunlight. After making long exposures of the sun reflecting on moving water, Dries discovered symbol-like figures throughout the image, as if the sun was trying to communicate with him through photography. But light is also photography's biggest enemy. What is a dark room if not a bunker protecting the precious undeveloped images from being attacked and destroyed by merciless sunlight? Even after being properly developed or printed, images will fade when exposed to light for a long period of time. Dries remembers discovering the destructive power of sunlight as a child while burning leaves with a magnifying glass. These childhood memories formed the starting point for the series. If a camera lens functions like a magnifying glass, something will start burning inside the camera when it's pointed at the sun, so he thought. The camera did not catch fire, but something much more surprising happened to the negatives. *Atmospheric renders* are the

uncanny images that resulted from an unpredictable reaction of the photosensitive material to a sudden hit of sunshine. By reversing the gaze inwards, Dries revealed the hidden universe that emerges within the apparatus he is holding in his hands.