Cut-Outs (excerpt), 2021

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A play of light, shadows, and colors animates the images in Jessica Backhaus's new series *Cut-Outs.* The photographer captures exactly what she sees with her camera, and yet these works have an abstract air. Anyone familiar with the artist's oeuvre will recognize this series as a logical continuation of the minimalism of her *Trilogy*, published in book form in 2017 and comprising the three series *Beyond Blue*, *Shifting Clouds,* and *New Horizons*. Those photographs beguile the eye with spare compositions that explored myriad shapes and materials. The current works, too, are quiet images that derive their incisiveness from reduction. In times of seclusion, when a radiant blue spring sky arcs undaunted over Berlin, Jessica Backhaus has turned her attention once again to her *Cut-Outs*. With a singular relish for experimentation, and guided by intuition and keen powers of observation, she overlaps colored shapes cut out in various sizes from transparent paper and arranges them in rich contrasts against a monochrome background. In the heat of the sun, the compositions gradually take on a life of their own: the flimsy pieces rear up, cast shadows, and change shape—creating an organically changing dance of forms. Two-dimensional cut-outs mutate into unpredictable object-like structures whose colors and materiality diffuse in the sunlight. Things formerly hidden take shape before our eyes. Every shift in light, however nuanced, creates a whole new world. And yet the cosmos of these fragile sculptures is short-lived: what exists one moment is immediately dissolved the next. As so often, it is precisely this fleeting moment that Jessica Backhaus evokes so compellingly in her art. She zeroes in on incidentals, things we see but do not consciously perceive. Her visual research is conducted with a sharp-eyed grasp of the essential. Using minimalist means she then creates complex constellations that exude a meditative serenity, whose power lies in phenomena that reliably recur. For all that predictability, however, what we witness here is a constant oscillation of identities born of a renewed commitment to form and color and light and shadow.

"The light swells and soon it will be summer," Albert Camus once wrote. "Eternity is there and I was hoping for it. What I wish for now is no longer happiness but simply awareness."

Jessica Backhaus's *Cut-Outs* invite us to partake in this alert contemplation of the here and now. Gazing at them, we feel the lightness of summer, the warmth of the sun, the life-affirming power of color, but also the constantly fluctuating continuum of a world of light and shadow.