

More than 17 years ago you have published your first book with TASCHEN. For our readers: How did your collaboration start with TASCHEN?

All this took place in 1993 in Cologne, which then was the centre of the German art world. I had my first solo show with Daniel Buchholz in the back room of a small antiques shop he ran with his father. The then TASCHEN editor Burkhard Riemschneider was one of the first to buy a print from the exhibition. At a dinner at Daniel's house I asked Burkhard if he could imagine for me to do a book. A few months later he took Angelika Muthesius, then editor in chief at TASCHEN to the gallery, where she fell in love with some of my pieces. In the meantime I had started editing a dummy made out of color xeroxes, which by Christmas 1993 was finished and which I showed to Angelika and Benedikt in Cologne. Friends thought it was premature to publish a major book at the age of 25, but I knew this work needed to get out. Thank God Benedikt thought so too.

Your first book „Tillmans“ was an instant success. Was that due to the „Zeitgeist“?

I guess my gut feeling was right. I myself felt not represented by the photography around at the time, so I had to make my own language and codes to express what life felt like to me. By the time the book came out it's newness and relevance was suddenly clear to see. But one shouldn't forget that the work and book was also not universally loved, a lot of people just didn't get it and thought they were just snapshots.

What were the circumstances of the creation of „Burg“?

Putting a strongly recognizable body of work out at a relatively young age, freed and encouraged me to focus on the things that were not yet fully developed but nevertheless of equal interest to me. Like still lifes, the drapery pictures of thrown or hung to dry clothes, land- and cityscapes as well as astronomical pictures. In 1997 as plans were already under way for the second book, tragedy struck through the sudden death of my partner. Work on the book, called 'Burg' as in a love name for rock or fortress, became a way of quietly mourning Jochen and the time we had together. The book still has a positive outlook, but is more contemplative.

How important is the book „Truth Study Centre“ for you today?

There's been a gap of seven years between Burg and TSC. It was coincidental but I still believe in seven years cycles. In the early 2000's I was publishing a number of museum catalogs as well as smaller artist's books. In 2004 I was newly in love with Anders and the time seemed right to look at the recent past as a whole in my work, looking at the different genres, old one as well as new ones like the conceptual 'paper drop' works or the abstract pictures. It was also a time of great political concern to me and questions about ideology and fundamentalism resurfaced after the less so inclined 90s. The importance of study and observation on the one hand, and the danger of claims of absolute truths by religious and political leaders on the other hand, were a lot on my mind. The Iraq war dominated and that's even how Tony Blair made it into the book: through his unfounded claims that there were WMD in Iraq, he was a good bad example. The title of the book is meant ambiguous, partially tongue in cheek, partially an unattainable goal. Later I gave the same title to a group of installations exploring political issues. To answer your question shortly: Yes the book still is important to me.

You have realized books with different publishers. What do you like about the collaboration with TASCHEN?

A common understanding is that there is more freedom with smaller companies and less freedom with the majors. The later half of the statement I have found to be completely untrue with

TASCHEN. As an author I'm given all control over content and design of my books. I have a strong interest in designing my own books and that freedom I have at TASCHEN as much as with a small art publisher. I hear that that is an exception in the big publishing world. Once the book is in the works it's a pleasure to work with the same great production team, headed by Horst Neuzner, on each book. A continuity not to be taken for granted. And then the whole publishing and press part of the company puts every effort and enthusiasm into getting the book seen and written about. Benedikt has a great eye for what can be done and what not, and before presenting a new project I'm still as nervous as the first time. TASCHEN in one hand combines the personal touch of a small publishing house with the reach and distribution of one of the worlds biggest publishing houses.

What is for you the distinctive charm of the re-edition of your three TASCHEN-Books?

I very much like how the smaller scale makes them more like novels, books to read. At a combined 530 pages there is a lot to discover and even for myself to rediscover. Of course I love the original editions, but they are also available second hand somewhere.

Is there a special anecdote in the context of any of your book signings, which you enjoy to recall?

The launch of my first book at the Atlantic in London got a bit out of hand. The queue went around the block and even Benedikt couldn't get in, until he, in good humour but firmly reminded the door people that he was actually paying for it all.