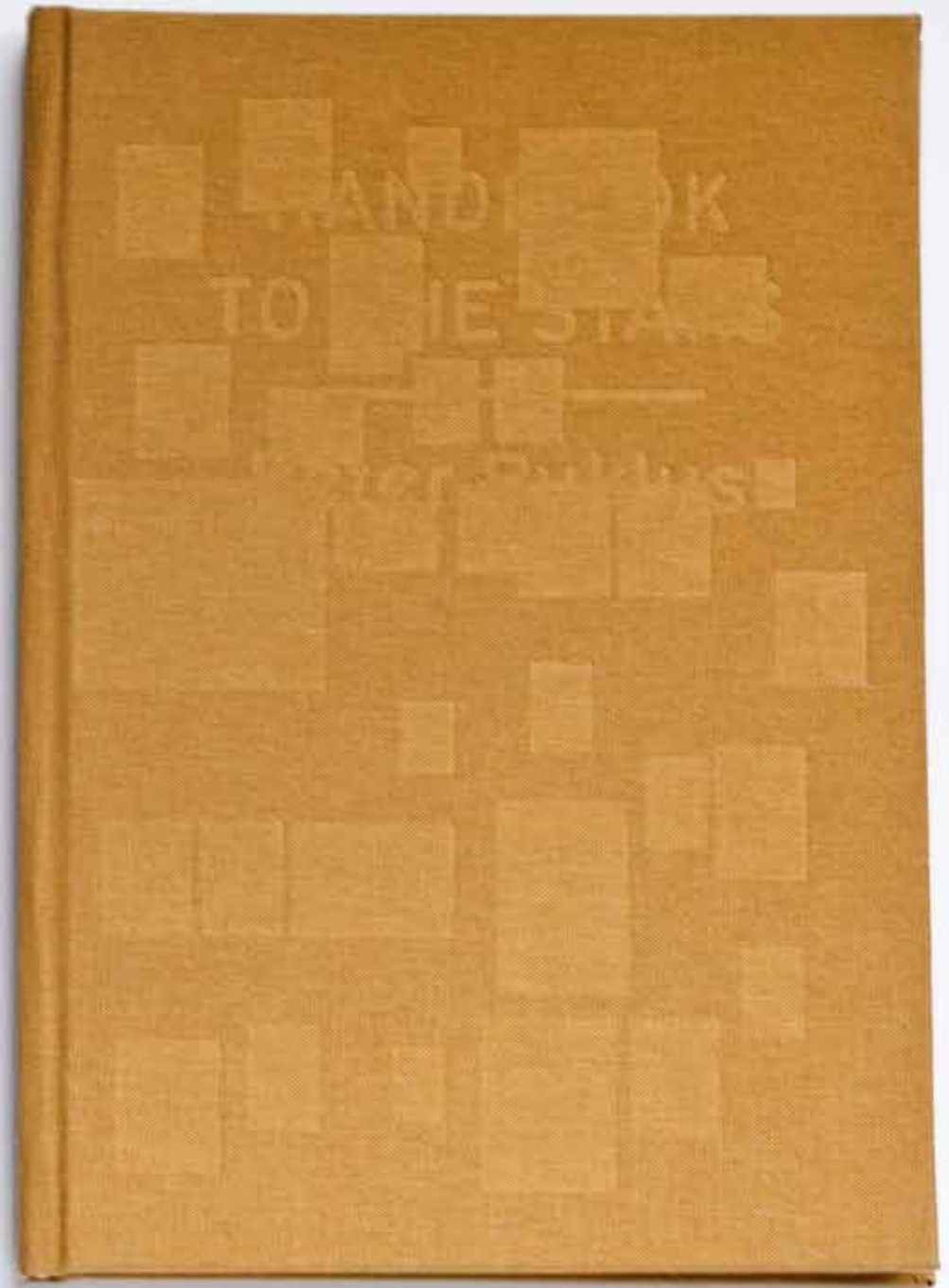


Peter Puklus

Handbook to the Stars



There is a reason why Peter Puklus' first publication is called Handbook to the Stars, a subtle manifesto of his *Ars Poetica*. With this handbook he attempts to portray his own universe and provide insight into how his photographic works relate to each other: like galaxies in relative proximity to one another that are bound together by their own gravitational force. The images function alongside one another and through one another, have no sequence or chronology, but exist individually even as they form interconnections and follow their own patterns. Hence they do not necessarily fit on a page in this book; the imaginary distances keep the images in place. This implies that they may appear fragmented, sometimes small, sometimes large, precisely as they coexist in Puklus' universe of images.

His work is not documentary, nor does it fall within other traditional photographic genres such as staged, portrait or still life photography. Freed from conventions, he works according to his own logic and interests, shifting naturally between genres, themes and media. Coincidence plays a minor role in his work. The famous decisive moment is irrelevant, because it has already taken place at a conceptual level. His photographs are visualisations of preconceived concepts which he initially records in sketches and notes, before painstakingly recreating them and capturing them with an analogue camera.

Puklus' work is in keeping with contemporary trends in photography. While the focus of many photographers in the '90s was on pure documentary, this has now shifted to a personal interpretation of the world, or perhaps more accurately, an interpretation of the inner world. Although photography is Puklus' primary medium, his method is not purely photographic. He frequently approaches his work as a kind of sculptor or installation artist. The compositions created in a studio-like setting are often spatial constructions, models or collages. In his studies of shapes we encounter fragile constructions, as well as objects to which he has made sometimes simple, sometimes radical alterations with an eye for the interplay of lines and geometric shapes. Like in the studio, his search for formal and three-dimensional aspects is also evident when he takes photographs in natural and urban environments. Just as he experiments with objects and shapes, so he also experiments with technology. Where necessary, he exchanges the static for the moving image, combines positive and negative images, and alternates black and white with colour.

Time is an interesting aspect, which is defined by a certain slowness and silence. It is not only the process preceding the actual image that is time-consuming; photographing itself is generally slow and meticulous. His subjects often denote a certain transience or even timelessness.

Particularly striking are the photos in which Puklus, using basic materials and self-made objects, recalls the figurative language of avant-garde and constructivist art; or photographs of classical sculptures whose representations recur in various compositions. The lamp is perhaps one of the most frequently recurring motifs. Several of these are often placed in a certain relationship to one another or hung up, immediately calling to mind the trajectories described by celestial bodies.

It is often said that this is a time when photography is undergoing dramatic changes. The question is, however, whether that was ever any different. Since the advent of digital photography, the assumption has been that it would supplant the slower analogue technology. The same goes for the photo book. This was also consigned to the history with the arrival of the internet and advanced digital presentation possibilities. The enormous and growing popularity of the photo book seems, for the time being at least, to prove the contrary. Puklus' universe argues for the survival of both.

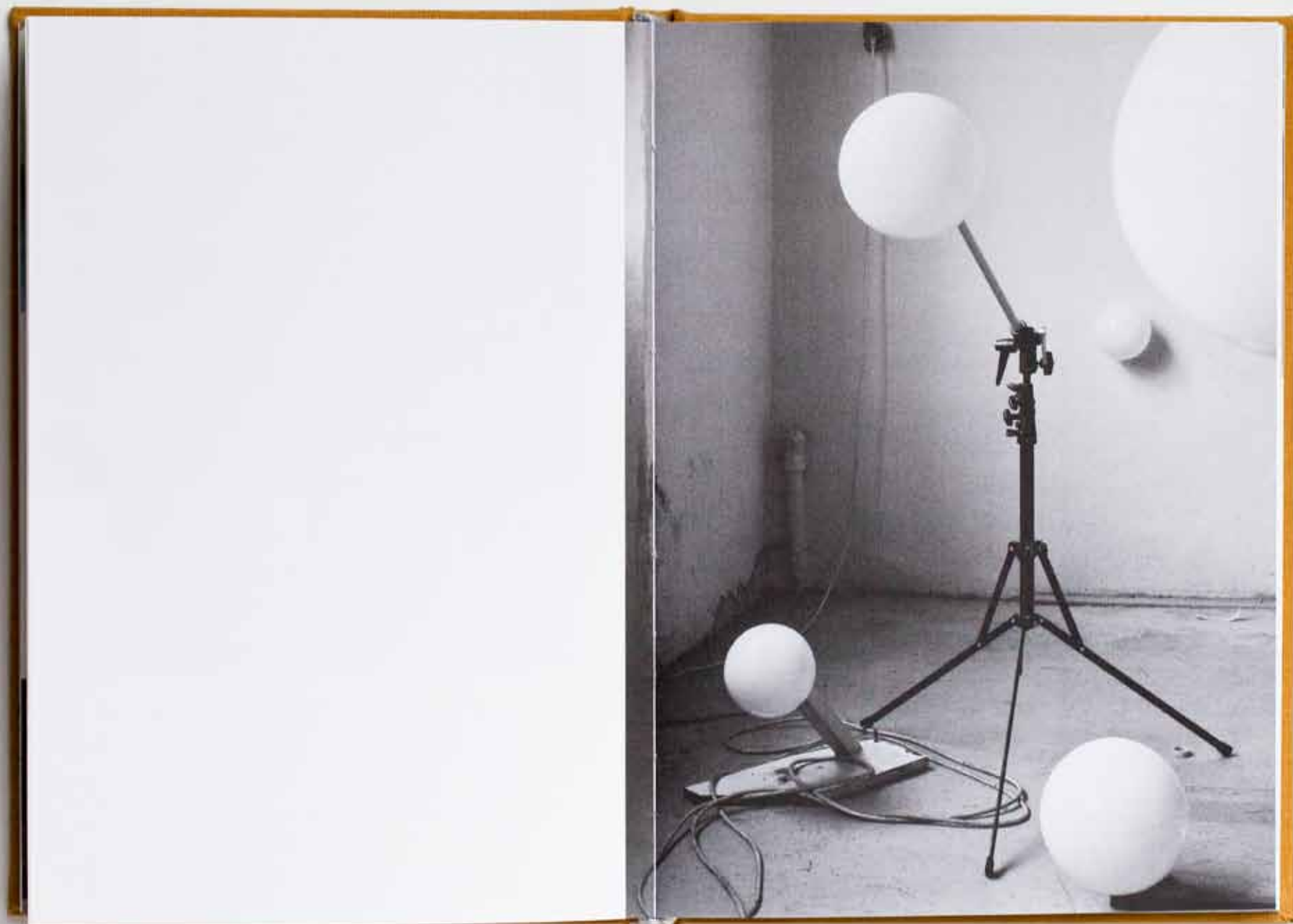
Claudia Küssel

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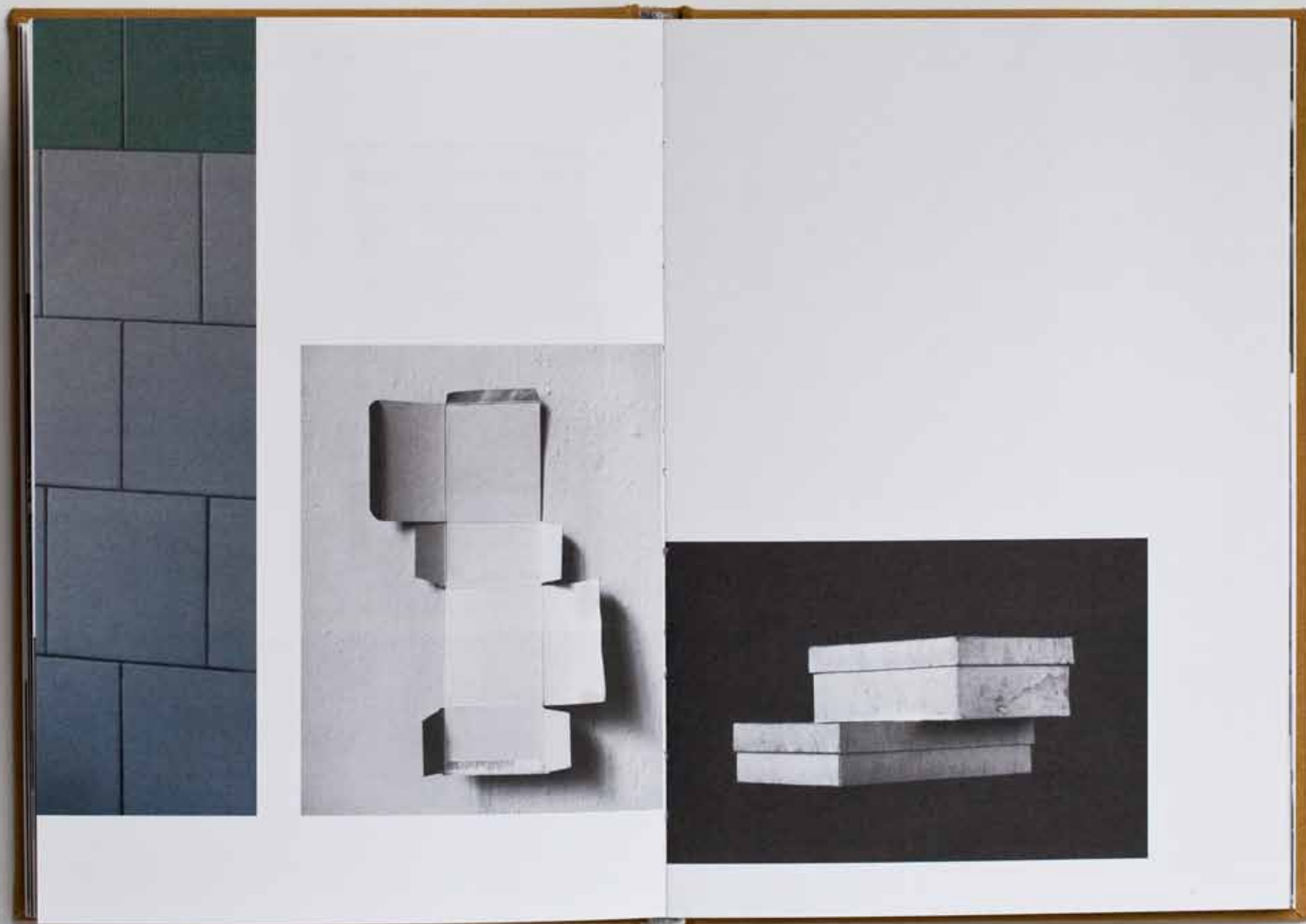








Peter Puklus: Handbook to the Stars







THINGS FALL OVER During the three year period making our book, Ghetto, Adam and I would often pass the time, during those countless journeys, building structures from peanuts and toothpicks. These were the two types of construction material available, no matter where we were in the world - a cocktail bar in Laguna Beach or a Macedonian motel overlooking a rubbish dump had lots of both. Wherever we went we found peanuts and toothpicks – they were a double act like us.

Each peanut could accept the sharp prick of no more than three toothpicks. Trial and error, hundreds of broken nuts and countless blunted toothpicks taught us. The peanut, the glue, the toothpick, the girder; and a series of triangulated structures, fanned out in three dimensions across the small unstable formica tables where we killed time between taking pictures.

We probably spent more time building these futuristic structures—reminiscent of Russian constructivism and occasionally Italian futurism—than taking pictures in fact, and this first book by Peter Puklus suggests that, had we been smart, we might have developed a parallel practice, divorced from our roles as documentarians, in which formica, peanuts and toothpicks were our only subject.

He did not pioneer this mode of observation. Peter Fischli and David Weiss have continued a tradition of Dadaesque still life that Man Ray championed. The young Swiss photography duo Nico and Taiyo continue to celebrate this mode of an ‘ant fucker’ absurdum. Taking into account the work of Roman Singer perhaps there is something essentially Swiss about humor in three dimensions.

Things connect, objects stay for a while in balance and then fall over, stairs are sometimes just stairs and boxes sometimes float. These are the sweet truths and matter of fact observations we can draw from Puklus’s elegant first book.

Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin



Title: Handbook to the Stars

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offset print, 13 color and 37 black and white images

Concept: Claudia Küssel and Peter Puklus

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The exhibition entitled Handbook to the Stars is the first presentation of Peter Puklus' newest series. The photographs were taken in Banská Stianica (Sk), where Peter was artist in residence during the past three months at Banská Stanica Contemporary, an institution run by Zuzana Bodnárová (curator) and Svätopluk Mikyta (artist).

This project is the continuation of an artistic process defined by the series Budapest Eden, started in 2009. Dreamlike symbols, mock-ups, installations, readymades. This series is the photo-documentation of a sculpting experiment, resembling the form and light exercises of the 20-s avant-garde. Handbook to the Stars attempts to visualize the infinitely flexible and tricky associative capacity of our brain. Peter Puklus chooses not to leave his studio during the making of this series, but to commit himself with body and soul to his vision and observations, in the company of trash and bric-a-brac, in complete isolation of the outside world. Following inner voices, he reveals and gives proof to deep, unknown and invisible relations and conspiracies.

Peter Puklus is the member of the Lumen board.

Gergely László

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