

Edition Patrick Frey

Press Release

Kris Lüdi
Smoke



When the most beautiful cows of the Appenzell villages are crowned in autumn, smoke rises over the festival grounds. On this day, children—often still in their early single-digit years—puff unabashedly on Krumme cigars, or Stumpfen as they are known locally, emblematic representatives of Swiss tobacco culture. They do so not in secret or as an act of rebellion, but in the midst of the village community, which not only tolerates the tradition but is also the very source of it. It is a gesture of acknowledgment for the children who take on agricultural work and responsibilities from an early age.

With his work *Smoke*, artist Kris Lüdi approaches the custom from a place of personal memory. As a child, Lüdi spent his summers with his grandparents in Appenzell and encountered the local children with the intimidated gaze of an outsider of the same age. Their nonchalant, down-to-earth manner conveyed a sense of meaning that resonated with him, and *Smoke* is his delayed response to that.

The result is a reflection on the progressive and conservative forces of the present, on local customs and cultural practices, and their positioning between tradition and modernity. *Smoke* ventures into the very heart of Switzerland. Folkloric tradition becomes the starting point for a photographic observation that documents reality—but does not claim to be a documentation. Instead, the portraits of smoking children create a space of resonance that extends far beyond the canton's borders.

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