

## Time Tunnel

*Urs Stahel*

Large-format photographs grab our attention quickly. They often demand that we “enter” them and experience them physically. Scott McFarland’s panoramas impose no such demand. Instead, they seem to invite us to lean back and get comfortable, to gaze at his “screens,” his photo “tableaux,” almost as if we were sitting in a cinema or theatre.

In this one, the boy and girl standing like sentinels in front of the large granite bowl in Berlin’s Lustgarten seem to be on the lookout. For acquaintances, friends, relatives? Posing for pictures? In any case, they are hardly waiting for opponents or aggressors; their attitudes are too relaxed. The granite bowl, showing considerable signs of wear and tear, underscores the youth of the two figures, who have landed somehow in this garden from another era.

It could be a snapshot. But then we notice the young mother, to the left, busy with her baby, and the old man with a dog on a leash, to the right, walking offstage. The longer we look, the more this supposed snapshot morphs into a carefully orchestrated construct, a treatise on genesis and demise, symbolizing different life energies. Perhaps the Roma girl with the accordion, in the middle ground, is providing musical accompaniment to the performance.

The scene is a complex configuration assembled from different elements and merged into a whole. We are looking at the work of an image builder, an image narrator. Scott McFarland takes many, sometimes hundreds of shots from the same vantage point, in rapid succession or weeks apart. People appear and disappear; plants sprout, grow, and bloom; trees lose their leaves; objects are inserted into the scene and then removed. Like a magician, like a demiurge, the artist connects different timelines, bringing some forward and letting others recede; omitting a figure, a couple, or a whole group, introducing new ones, and positioning them all within an envisioned arrangement. He condenses time into one space, and simultaneously expands the space across time, creating a much larger dimension.

To understand the process, imagine wafer-thin sheets of transparent film stacked to form a box. Peering down into the see-through stack, we discern presences and actions occurring in the same place across different timelines. At his computer, the photographer moves digital data from different shots onto the same plane, where they are synchronized, shifted, accentuated, and brought into new configurations that he has previously imagined or which occur to him during—and as a result of—the process. Finally, the image fragments are “incorporated,” rendered to fit into a whole: a single but complex condensed composite of times and views.

Thus, people who have never met, not even as passersby on the street, encounter one another in an image, bounded by the same frame, under a scorching sun and dark clouds simultaneously.



**Scott McFarland**

*The Granite Bowl in the Berlin Lust Garten (after Johann Erdmann Hummel)*, 2006  
inkjet print, 109.2 x 157.5 cm