

Edition Patrick Frey

Press Release

Jean Willi
Steingesichter



Pareidolia is the phenomenon of perceiving non-existing things in inanimate objects, such as human faces or animal heads in rocks. One well-known example is the Face on Mars, also known as the Cydonia Face after the region on the Red Planet where it can be seen. Pareidolia is a misapprehension of an object by the mind, which alters it according to its own imaginings or completes it to form a familiar image. Over the years, the Swiss painter and writer Jean Willi has photographed rocks that seem to have faces, thereby discovering a realm of stone apparently teeming with petrified “souls”. It is often the sunlight that traces a face in the rock, which then disappears when the light changes. Sometimes it’s only two dark spots like eyes, out of which the viewer fashions a face in the mind’s eye. The question is what do we actually see and what do we consciously or unconsciously turn into something familiar. The dawn of art might even be traced to such subjective sightings. Shamans claim they need to make out faces in plants and stones in order to contact certain spirits. Over the course of his work, the photographer’s gaze has changed to a point where he is convinced that faces are displayed in at least two thirds of rocks and stones. Most of us are familiar with the eerie experience of mistaking a branch or crumpled paper lying in the street for a snake or run-over bird (a pigeon or chicken, depending on the urban or rural environment), respectively. Many of the faces in this book seem so real that it’s hard to believe their features are drawn only by nature and the play of light. It goes without saying that none of the photographed rocks has been rearranged and none of the photos retouched.

The images were taken on Ibiza, Spain, between April 27, 2015, and January 12, 2017.

Jean Willi (b. 1945, Basel) studied art in Basel and completed his training in graphic design in 1967. He lived in Paris for a few years before traveling to Africa in 1969. Since 1974 Willi has been freelancing as a painter and writer in Spain and Basel. This artist’s book was also designed by the author.

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