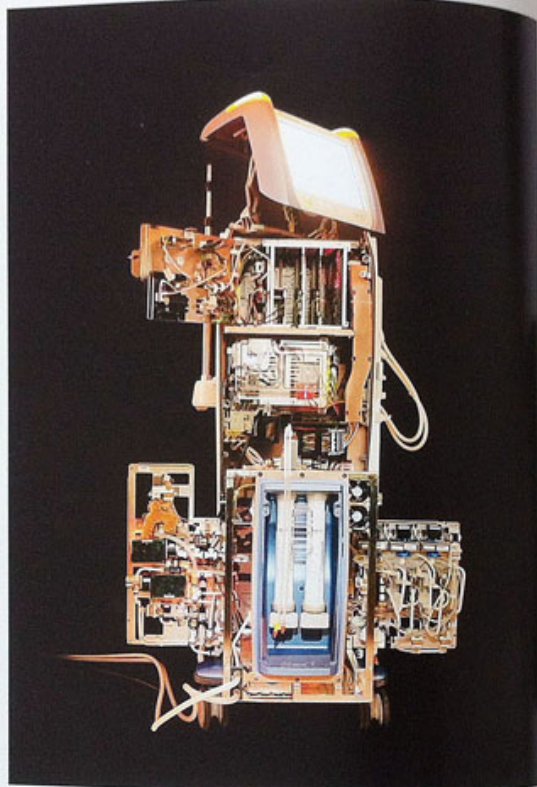




REINER RIEDLER
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Reiner Riedler tackles life, death and the human spirit of survival in his dramatic images of medical apparatuses



Austrian photographer Reiner Riedler had the idea to photograph hospital machines after the birth of his son two years ago. "My son was moved to an intensive care unit immediately after he was born. I remember the lights in the hospital when we arrived on the first evening and being impressed by the aura and presence of the life-support machines. I remember thinking that if my son survived, it would only be with the help of medical science and technology."

Six months after his son's recovery, Riedler began initiating his project. The idea was to broach the subjects of illness,

medical crises and death, by photographing the medical machines involved in the processes of healing patients, for example, artificial hearts, incubators and dialysis machines.

Upon receiving permission to photograph in the intensive care units and operation theatres at one of Austria's largest hospitals in Vienna, Riedler initially planned to include people in his images. However, after witnessing the traumatic nature of events in hospitals, he changed tack. "I was ashamed to photograph in the rooms where patients were lying and fighting for life," he

says. "I ended up in an operation room looking down into the open chest of a man and saw his heart beating. I wasn't prepared for this so I left. In the end I decided to photograph the machines in isolation, distanced from their place of use. It was an ethical decision."

Among the themes Riedler addresses in *The Lifesaving Machines* is the link between man and simulated human behaviour, man's efforts to control his own nature, and the ability of medical science to save and prolong human life. Riedler visited several hospitals and companies that manufacture the machines, and set up a black

background for each shoot.

"I am not a traditional studio photographer and I normally shoot on location," he says. "But this was a challenge. I tried not to exaggerate the lighting."

There is drama in the images and the machines look hyper-real, theatrical and majestic, almost as though they are alien creatures. "The machines are beautiful; some look human or like robots or Star Wars characters. I think the designers were joking slightly when they created these machines."

"One of the most exciting moments was when I saw a dialysis machine on a podium," he adds.



PHOTOGRAPH BY REINER RIEDLER



"It looked like an altar. I asked the technician to switch on the machine just to see what would happen and it was overwhelming. I had the feeling that the whole of life in all its beauty and mystery was opening up in front of me."

The biggest challenge was being confronted with illness and death, he says. "When you photograph artificial hearts, you automatically think about your own mortality. But the project helped me to make my peace with these topics. I don't want to frighten but, rather, to show the beauty of life through these images." 209

