

KATZ CONTEMPORARY

ELGER ESSER

Cabinet de travail

29 May - 31 July 2015

Opening: Thursday, 28 May 2015
Play reading: Thursday 16 July, 6.30 pm

KATZ CONTEMPORARY Gallery is delighted to present the second exhibition of photographic works by Elger Esser (*1967, Stuttgart, lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany) in Zurich. The installation show features different media whose motifs refer to two French gardens: Jean-Henri Fabre's "Harmas" in Sérignan-du-Comtat and Claude Monet's garden in Giverny. Both gardens have been founded for a certain purpose and both place the intellectual conception of creation into the outdoors – the garden.

Esser's latest works were developed in the so-called "Harmas", the garden of famous entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre in Sérignan-du-Comtat in the county of Vaucluse. The scientist and author of *Souvenirs Entomologiques* lived there with his family for over 30 years until his death, the estate being the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream. In *Souvenirs Entomologiques* Fabre writes: "This is what I have been looking for, hoc erat in votis: a piece of land, no, not particularly big, but enclosed and protected from curious gazes; a piece of land, abandoned, infertile, burned by the sun but hospitable for thistles and hymenoptera. It is a "Harmas". That is what an uncultivated, rocky area, which has been surrendered to wild thyme is called (...)."

Not only for Jean-Henri Fabre but also for Elger Esser the garden and nature in general serves as the actual workroom – *Le cabinet de travail*. Unlike in earlier works the horizon in the photographs of the "Harmas" is usually invisible and the dense growth of plants makes a gaze over the expansive plains impossible. On the contrary, the viewer gets drawn into the vegetation and the thicket. There is no real "sublime" in the romantic sense anymore, the sublime rather reveals itself in the internalization. It is the projection of an imaginary world into the landscape, which increasingly shifts into the photographer's focus, while at the same time the photograph starts to dissolve more and more into a painterly quality.

These works are contrasted with photographs, which Esser took in Claude Monet's garden in Giverny. Like in Fabre's "Harmas" the pieces show a tamed, cultivated and almost museum-like type of nature. The images of the series were mainly taken at night – captured during nights lit by a full moon with an exposure time of up to six hours – or in the early morning hours which gives them a certain filigree and at the same time a leaden quality, caused by the heavily weighing darkness upon the scenery of the lily pond, surrounded by weeping willows and the Japanese bridge. The curious magic of silence turns the garden into a surreal, timeless place of longing and makes it tangible for the viewer as a spiritual landscape, which is dedicated to work.

Elger Esser belongs to the second generation of the Becher school. Bernd and Hilla Becher's language as well as the affinity to 19th century aesthetics are clearly visible in his work. Like no other, Esser has incorporated these qualities in his practice, yet it bears none of the sober and cool aesthetics of other Becher students: His large scale photographs of landscapes and places are inspired by painting and photography of the 19th century, its literature and old postcards. These points of reference become apparent in Esser's choice of motif and composition: He shows unchanged, ephemeral and almost romantic sceneries which inevitably bring to mind the romantic painters and Caspar David Friedrich through their color scheme and composition as well as the frequent use of a low horizon. The images of mostly deserted landscapes are usually taken shortly before sunrise or at dawn with long time exposure, making the contours appear soft and creating a distinctive lighting and atmosphere.

We would like to inform you of the upcoming **play reading on 16 July at 6.30 pm** with the well-known actor **Thomas Sarbacher** who will read from Jean-Henri Fabre's *Souvenirs Entomologiques*, vol. 1 and be musically accompanied by the tenor **Daniel Bentz**.

Stefanie Schneider

For visual material and further information please contact the gallery:
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PREVIEW

Andreas Walser

with Florio Puentner, Ueli Alder, Willy Spiller & Robert B. Käppeli

28 August - 10 October 2015

Opening: 27 August 2015

Theater performance "Métro zum Höllentor"

with Graziella Rossi / Helmut Vogel

30 September 2015, 7.30 pm

tickets / info: info@katzcontemporary.com / 044 212 22 00