

A R T E C O N T E M P O R A N E A

A L B E R T O

P E O L A

Silenzi

Bernd e Hilla Becher, Paola De Pietri, Olafur Eliasson, Elger Esser, Candida Höfer, Louise Lawler, Sophy Rickett

Opening: Friday 15 May 2009, 6.00 to 11.00 pm

Exhibition from Saturday 16 May to Friday 24 July 2009

Opening times: 3.30 to 7.30 pm Monday through Saturday, mornings by appointment

Silence: There are no voices in these natural landscapes, in these places that bear witness to an industrial past and in these public spaces, nor is there a title – that key to unlocking a work proposed by the artist - or a single perspective from which the images are to be understood.

The exhibit opens with a set of two *Water Towers* photographed by **Bernd and Hilla Becher** in the USA. The unmistakable mark of these German artists is evident in their use of black and white photography (particularly refined in these two photographs), the repetition of the same types of industrial architecture – always of the same size and centrally positioned - and light that is shadowless and neutral. However, the two water towers are less decontextualized here than in other photographs of the same series; in fact, tiny houses and trees with sharply defined branches provide a unique background which, given the absolute rigour of the image, further heightens the subject's monumental quality.

In **Olafur Eliasson's** work as well, the individual photographs are part of a broader collection. They are organized by subject matter and share common formal aspects, such as uniform dimensions and a horizon line which always appears at the same level in the photographs. Observed one by one, each photograph presents in rich detail the various characteristics of a particular feature of the Icelandic landscape, which in geological terms is still young, powerful and in a constant state of evolution. The photographs of the *Iceland series* show frozen landscapes dotted with lava cones. The detail in the ice and rock comes through with crystalline clarity, and a dull light is created by a blanket of clouds through which only a bit of sunlight can pass.

The constant shift between single compositions and serial arrangements is also present in *Twelve Trees, M40*, by **Sophy Rickett**. Each photograph shows an isolated tree outlined against a perfect black background and decontextualized from the surrounding environment. Hers is a formal and conceptual choice that highlights the unique characteristics of each individual tree by drawing attention to its finest details; yet at the same time the tree seems to be a sort of specimen, there to represent the standard features of a particular biological species. The boundary lines for interpreting nature and landscape become blurred, as Rickett departs from a romantic portrayal of trees that glow against the surrounding darkness and sets them instead in a colder and more scientific grid-like collocation.

Elger Esser's work follows a path that lies somewhere between photographic documentation and pictorial reference to artwork of the past. His large-scale landscapes feature water as the dominant

element, the colours are reduced to the essential, often with a yellow dominant, the light is milky and the atmosphere rarefied and emotionally-charged. There seems to emerge a diffused sense of immobility and silence. Although the title of the work denotes a precise geographical location - *Montlouis, France* on display – in Esser's photographs there is a sort of abstraction that produces a fascinating tension between the landscape encountered by the artist and the viewer's direct emotional response.

In **Paola De Pietri's** photographs of the desert – images that seem painted by hand – poetry prevails over information, symbolic function over communication. The artist analyzes, explores and contemplates reality, extracting from it images that can be enjoyed for their figurative beauty alone. "Paola De Pietri passes through the landscape in order to place the spectator in the spot traditionally occupied by the contemplator. [...] By doing so, she restores things to time rather than to space. [...] To her, photography is the means she uses to slow down the rhythm of this time, the flow of visions and the impressions of reality itself. This deceleration leads to unique experiences, opening up to the other and the unforeseen." [From Sergio Risaliti, *Another time, other than me* in the catalogue for the April – May 2008 exhibition].

In *San Augustin, Mexico*, **Candida Höfer** photographed the church while it was under restoration. The pure, austere quality of the building is all the more evident in its stripped form, as two central rows of statues on pillars face each other symmetrically. In *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München*, classical statues are framed to horizontal and vertical perfection as they "crowd" the room. Churches, museums and other public spaces are recurrent in the artist's work, and though they are always photographed devoid of people, they are no less significant for this reason. They appear as places suspended in time during a break from their normal function, in an almost metaphysical silence that charges them with special intensity. If we only learned to listen to them, these spaces could tell us what they usually keep hidden from sight.

Louise Lawler's photographic work explores art and its role. By photographing works of art in museums, foundations and private collections, the artist shows how these objects are selected and displayed, underlining the effect that context has on the perception of an artistic work and raising questions about the significance of art in our society. This exhibition presents *Nantes II*, in which the balance between shape and colour transforms the pieces of art being photographed into "aesthetic signs" that take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are found.

"*And art is always a collaboration with what came before you and what comes after you*". Louise Lawler

For further information, please contact the gallery.

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