VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE



Elger Esser

Couleur sur Couleur

07.11.2025–17.01.2026

We are delighted to invite you to attend the fourth Elger Esser solo show at the Van der Grinten Galerie. On this occasion the artist will present twelve works in their debut showing. Created from 2024-2025, these works represent the next chapter in his oeuvre, a further development of the characteristic Esser pictorial cosmos, one in which a strange sense of timelessness holds sway, beguiling the viewer like a lingering dream or a distant memory.

The work of Elger Esser oscillates between photography and painting. It comprises and evokes so many references that it seems sensible to give an overview of several key elements, to position the wonderful exhibition Couleur sur Couleur within the context of Esser's now three decades of ongoing work.

Since the mid-1990s, Elger Esser has developed a photographic work borne by the leitmotif landscape, a conceptual approach and a poetic sensibility. Yet he is actually deeply engaged with a fundamental and much more comprehensive issue that is recurrent

Van der Grinten Galerie
Ackerstraße 144
40233 Düsseldorf

throughout the whole of art history: that of the invention of a picture so forceful in its expression that, despite all temporality, it succeeds in touching an essential dimension at the core of human perception and sensibilities. *"There is such a thing as a collective memory, and perhaps there is also a perception of images with the same kind of general validity"*, so says Esser.

To enrich his artistic cogitations, Elger Esser explores not only the possibilities offered by the medium photography and its history, but all areas of painting as well. For example he engages with the pictorial heritage of significant artists of the past, including Canaletto, Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner, as well as Claude Monet and Gustave Le Gray, great modernists of 19th century painting and photography. Esser also gains inspiration from another category of great "picture makers", namely novelists, including Flaubert, Proust and, most recently, Julien Gracq... those able to use words to awaken emotions, forms, colors and impressions in the mind (the inner eye) of the reader.

In addition, the artist combines his knowledge and mastery of old techniques (photographing with view cameras, heliogravure, colorization of black and white originals) with the latest digital technologies – digital photography, artificial intelligence and even completely new techniques. Indeed, the interplay of various combinations of and connections between photography and painting, in terms of content but also form, prompted Esser to develop his own novel procedure: the dry ink printing of photographs onto silver-plated copper plates, sealed with a fine layer of shellac – like varnish on a painting. Esser went to great lengths to bring this technique to fruition, and it has only been workable for about ten years now. The result is a blurring of the boundaries between the different media; their interaction becomes utterly fluid and temporal attributions immaterial.

And viewers will find some of the works being presented for the very first time at the Van der Grinten Galerie even more confounding: Elger Esser has now begun to use a paintbrush and oil paint to underscore the effect of the photographs and the landscapes-on-metal. He thus gives them a new dimension that makes these works even more tactile, sensuous and irreal. The views and landscapes, already captivating with their unreal character and elusive pictorially, now become magical hybrid paintings.

In addition to the seascapes and cloudy skies in soft aquarelle colors, or works with an atmosphere reminiscent of a rising or setting moon of irreal subtlety, à la C.D. Friedrich, here Esser also shows us the ruins of castles, or simply abandoned chateaux and overgrown terrace gardens: the *Tour de Merle*, the *Folie Siffait* on the banks of the Loire, the castle *Bagatelle* in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris... at these historical sites he captures the contrast between the quiet, damp darkness of the interiors and the views of luminous exterior areas in mirrors or through open windows or doors – perhaps symbolic of the inner and outer world. Sometimes we see only the remains of a wall in an overgrown garden patch, a dark staircase with worn steps, the faded luxurious décor of a once magnificent festive hall … – the artist makes the invisible essence of the past visible.

Neither the choice of motifs nor the extremely precise composition nor the segueing shades of ochre and green tones, to which the artist deftly adds almost imperceptible color accents, are coincidental. The works of Elger Esser stir a feeling buried deep in our pictorial memory, a feeling nurtured by stories from the past and visits to mysterious historical places. In so doing the Esser works unfold an irresistible suggestive force to which one willingly succumbs.