VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE

Elger Esser

Das stille Sein

18.11.2023–28.01.2024

Das stille Sein (The Stillness of Being) is the third Elger Esser solo exhibition at the Van der Grinten Galerie. We are pleased to present a selection of his latest works, the result of his explorations in the north of France. At different times of the day and year he photographed Mont-Saint-Michel, ebb and flow in the tidal flats, the coastline and, farther inland, the landscapes along the course of the Loire in which the river is embedded.

For 30 years, Elger Esser has travelled the regions of France searching for archetypical landscapes. In his most recent works the experience of landscape concentrates on the transition from the coastline to the sea and on up into the sky above, with its spectacle of changing cloud formations. The possibilities offered by the techniques that Esser himself has developed have clearly provided a strong impetus for his artistic development: a direct pigment printing process is used to transfer the analog photography images to silver-plated copper plates, which are then coated with shellac and mounted in specially designed

frames, so that the finished work appears to be an organic hybrid of painting and photography. The metallic foundation layer amplifies the photographically captured light and its play of reflections in the sky and water, significantly intensifying the radiance of the colors. This element of depth and vitality inherent in the picture is heightened by the viewer's own movement in front of the work, as both light and colors seem to change with a shifting perspective. The result is a perfect congruity of the portrayal and the portrayed.

The landscapes of Elger Esser emanate an overwhelming presence, yet the images are most often of inconspicuous places. He is intent on distilling a landscape down to its essence. A recurring theme in the artist's work is the interconnection of nature with testaments of building culture, but in such a way that the motifs exist in a realm devoid of chronological or spatial markers, giving rise to something universal and timeless. It is from this vantage point that Esser views the stupendous silhouette of Mont-Saint-Michel, which has rested for a millennium in the breathtakingly beautiful tidal seascape, as a symbol of the experience of the immanence of things.

Why does watching the setting and rising of the sun hold human beings the world over in its thrall? Perhaps because we find in this natural phenomenon a clearly visible manifestation of beauty, an otherwise so abstract and often controversial concept, perhaps also because it gives the individual a feeling of belonging to the world, to a great, incomprehensible whole. To view the beauty of the landscape in the wonder of the light is to take pause and marvel, to be still and to feel and hear one's own inner self in the stillness of being. It is to access a profound level, a space in which the enigmas of existence lie hidden, far from the loud and hectic constraints of daily life.

Elger Esser was born in 1967 in Stuttgart and grew up in Rome. From 1991 to 1997 he studied with Bernd Becher at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Esser's work is represented in the following museum collections, among others: Guggenheim Museum New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Kunsthaus Zürich, Centre Pompidou Paris, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus Munich, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.