

ELGER ESSER

NEW WORKS

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

23 Friday - 20 Saturday



We are pleased to announce our ninth solo exhibition with new works from Düsseldorf artist Elger Esser (born in 1967). It coincides with the first extensive museum exhibition of Elger Esser that can be seen in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart until April 11th, 2010. As one of the recent and youngest graduates of the famous class of Bernd and Hilla Becher at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Elger Esser is unquestionably among today's most important German photo artists.

The classic genres of vedute and landscape are central themes in Elger Esser's photographs. Recent years have seen the development of formal relationships with these genres due to extensive monochromatic colouring, a preference for diffuse, uniform lighting, and constant tension between micro and macro structures. The perfect synthesis of the timeless ideal of the beauty of the old masters and the technical exploration of the medium of photography is unique nowadays. Sensitive and precise in his observation, Elger Esser searches for and finds those moments in scenes that reveal the character and mood of a landscape. He frequently develops the personality of a landscape in the context of regional architecture. It is not by chance that Elger Esser's photographs often have associations with the travel literature of the late 18th and 19th Centuries. His extensive background knowledge appears in his photographs. And just as often there are art historical references that evoke the art form of the 19th Century postcard and 17th Century Dutch painting.

Based on his very unique world of images, Esser also reflects 19th Century French art. Associations with the artistic trends of Impressionism and Pointillism are apparent. On the relationship between photography and painting, Esser remarks: "Photography today satisfies demands that historically were satisfied by painters. I clearly see my work as reminiscent of this" (Elger Esser, 2001). The cool objective view of Bernd Becher, his instructor at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, is not as evident in Elger Esser's work - whose photographs could be described as poetic documentation of subjective recollections - as it is in the work of his fellow students. Comparable however is the formal austerity of the pictorial composition, which is a leitmotif running throughout his works.

"[Many] of Elger Esser's landscape photographs reveal endlessness as an artistic principle. The parts again and again dissolve into an intentional abstraction of the whole picture. As with his predecessors Courbet, Monet, Turner and Maupassant, water is a recurring motif in Elger Esser's images, whether in the form riverscapes, pounding surf, or wetlands stretching deep into the landscape. [...] Some of his landscapes seem like dream images or sequences in a borderline world between reality and imagination" (Alexander Pühringer, 2009).

In addition to classic photographs, we are also showing a series of heliogravures. Heliogravure (from the Greek helios - sun) is a printing technique invented in the late 19th Century in which a printing plate is made using photographic processes. What is special about this is that it enables precise reproduction of half-tone images allowing a great sense of depth to be achieved. Heliogravure flourished between 1890 and 1910 when it was mainly used for monochrome illustrations in particularly valuable books. Esser created the group of heliogravures in Kurt Zein's famous etching workshop in Vienna.

Esser's works are found in numerous institutional collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, the Guggenheim Museum New York, Kunsthau Zurich, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery Buffalo and the Fonds régional d'art contemporain (FRAC) Paris.