

Sies + Höke Galerie

Poststrasse 2 + 3
40213 Düsseldorf

t +49. 211. 30 14 360
f +49. 211. 30 14 36 29
post@sieshoeke.com
www.sieshoeke.com

Julius von Bismarck | Landscape Painting

Apr 23rd – May 22nd, 2021



Julius von Bismarck, Landscape Painting (Quarry day), 2021

Where does our perspective on nature come from? Is it determined in part by how art presents it to us? In his works, Julius von Bismarck researches processes of perception which shape our understanding of the natural. He has used direct confrontation with natural phenomena in various ways: by filming forest fires and raging hurricanes or by redirecting lightning. The drastic inclusion of himself as an artist is almost always essential for him.

In his Landscape Painting realised in 2021, Julius von Bismarck creates a picture not of, but in the volcanic landscape he has chosen. He thereby eliminates the dividing line between the artist subject and the object to be painted: instead of creating a distance in order to place the landscape as a miniature within the painting, he enters it, dissolves the distance to his image, attempts to master its size and physically confronts its monumental dimensions in order to finally conquer it. The resulting picture of the landscape, created by this brutal encounter and performed through the body, becomes proof of this struggle with the subject and shifts the topos of an artist's inner struggle with his objects to the exterior.

It is not only in this aspect that von Bismarck counteracts the principles of artistic production. His Landscape Painting breaks with expectations of the singularity and originality of a work of art by medially re-locating the landscape representation he has created, but imitating it nonetheless. The black vertical and horizontal lines applied as plein air painting to the formations of a disused quarry on Lanzarote in the winter of 2021 are aesthetically based on Old Master prints. His main reference are Italian vedute, woodcuts and copperplate engravings of the 18th and 19th centuries, which were intended to depict the landscapes as realistically and representatively as possible.

Sies + Höke Galerie

Poststrasse 2 + 3
40213 Düsseldorf

t +49. 211. 30 14 360
f +49. 211. 30 14 36 29
post@sieshoeke.com
www.sieshoeke.com

The function of the veduta as mere documentation of the existent was already undermined at the time by the simultaneous endeavour to idealise what was depicted. The contradiction in relation to the representation of nature is therefore already inherent in the medium of the veduta that von Bismarck appropriates and places in the contemporary context by means of the Landscape Paintings. He analyses the discrepancies and creates an inverted trompe-l'œil: instead of feigning three-dimensionality in the classical manner by means of perspective tricks, he effects the transformation of the landscape in the form of photographic documentation into a two-dimensional figure by means of the typical reproduction features of printmaking - lines and crosshatching on paper - applied to the stone walls which in turn can only be recognised at closer inspection as just that and not as a print.

For a long time, the quarry was a typical subject of artistic production. By looking at quarry studies - from Albrecht Dürer and Casper David Friedrich to Paul Cézanne and Paul Klee - we may reflect on whether we want to consider the environment as pre-human existence and nature or as the idea of a condition that takes human intervention into account. Albrecht Dürer, an innovator of landscape painters, alongside his rock studies, devotes himself to the sculptural landscapes of former and active quarries, which are the result of human intervention rather than evidence of topographical circumstances.

Romanticism, which brings about a completely new form of landscape painting, intentionally elevates all existence into the realm of the sublime. Thus, according to the poet Novalis, it was necessary to give the ordinary a higher meaning and the commonplace a mysterious prestige. Caspar David Friedrich's Quarry near Krippen of 1813 or his painting Tombs of the Old Heroes of 1812 show human intervention in the quarry as beautiful wounds inflicted on nature by man's desire to exploit materials. Friedrich, following the Romantic idea, said: "You criticise and say that the object is different in nature and that the painter has seen much that is not real. I honour what you criticise, for what the painter has seen is always beautiful and remains true to the character of the object and of nature." Following the dialectic of what has been said, it could be argued that if quarries are not considered worthy of depiction today, nothing is seen into them anymore, possibly because they are no longer the subject of contemporary image production of the natural world and its aesthetic exaggerations.

Julius von Bismarck's intervention is also an attack on nature. The path to the picture is partly a destructive one, for the methods of his image creation avenge his exertions through an invasive intervention in the subject, which is henceforth irreversibly marked. When he himself speaks of a simplification of a landscape by means of colouring and dividing it into black and white areas in order to make the complexity of a construction of nature more comprehensible, and of media that have their share in this kind of simplification of nature, then he is following a traditional approach, however, with means that are beyond simplicity but instead demand total commitment.

With his fourth Landscape Painting, Julius von Bismarck does not find a fundamental answer to the enquiries of a contemporary perspective on nature. He deconstructs classical themes and aesthetics of art history and exposes contradictions in the discourse on nature conducted in art with the means of imitation, falsification and irritation. In the end, the question remains: How do we see nature today?

Juliet Kothe