

KETELEER GALLERY is very pleased to present *Desert Spirals*, a solo exhibition by Sybren Vanoverberghe (°1996, Kortrijk, BE. Lives and works in Ghent and Otegem, BE.). Vanoverberghe's second solo exhibition with the gallery consists of an entirely new series of photographic works in a scenographic intervention by Theo De Meyer.

In this new exhibition, Sybren Vanoverberghe reveals a new series of photographs that were taken in the evocative Moroccan desert. The series of images show us a parade of artefacts and hideouts, isolated and serenely present within the vast landscape. But also depictions of ancient engravings and other faded traces from bygone times like a dead dromedary, floating in a state between fossil and cadaver, drowned under the smouldering heat of a blazing sun. Ruins embrace the desert vegetation and improvised human structures turn into shelters in this merciless landscape.

The series submerges itself in the 'nothingness' the desert has to offer its visitors. This nothingness inspired Vanoverberghe to go on an extensive quest for traces from a recent or nearly forgotten past. For quite some time now this archaeological approach has been the main theme of his artistic odyssey. The traces manifesting in *Desert Spirals* take on different guises but they are, above all, oozing with human spirit.

The human presence manifests itself in the hastily erected constructions nestling in the landscape. The materials used are often left behind. Sometimes they're swallowed up by the landscape, other times they've been reused in a new shape. Building materials like a weathered lamppost that served its purpose, a carpet resting to dry or a newly chiselled bloc of marble that was recently freed from a rock become the décor in the vast and barren sand plain.

The series focuses on the idea of humble societies, nomadic living and the art of building with few materials. The ancient engravings merge with contemporary images of the desert landscape, creating a play with past and present, time and place. This unique imagery and often overexposed pictures create a continual motion from image to image. Every image functions as a portal to the next, with association and design leading the way.

For this new exhibition, Vanoverberghe has joined hands with architect and scenographer Theo De Meyer. Together they have converted the gallery space into a maze of rooms through which the visitor is guided by means of custom made doors, portals and obstacles. Simple building materials were stacked up and positioned to add an additional layer of tension to the presented images. It feels as though one is suddenly dropped into an anachronistic décor in which everyone suddenly put down their tools in the middle of the construction process and vanished.

The exhibition explores the delicate balance between architecture, and its remnants, and the relicts man left behind in a desert landscape. Vanoverberghe investigates how he can capture these traces through photography in an associative way. *Desert Spirals* thus turns into a stroll between stirring images functioning like precious notes from a landscape of nothingness.

*Koen Leemans, 2023.*

The exhibition will be on view 2 September – 7 October, 2023.