

Martin Dammann

Irrlichter

07.09.–02.11.2024

Opening: 06.09.2024, 6–9 p.m.

Martin Dammann's (*1965, Friedrichshafen/Lake Constance, Germany) artistic practice oscillates between photography, video, drawing, and watercolors. The artist draws inspiration from his collection of private photographs and his own recordings. From these, he creates large-format watercolors that capture certain elements of the images while challenging classic techniques, rules, and clichés associated with the medium of watercolor. The works displayed in the Irrlichter exhibition capture the mystical interplay between light, darkness, and the permanent human state of searching. This atmospheric collection, inspired by the elusive phenomenon and legends of will-o'-the-wisps (Irrlichter) from folk tales, is a testament to Dammann's ability to capture the fleeting moments in photographs and translate them into timeless images.

A few years ago, Dammann celebrated his birthday with his friends and gave them a task. On a cold January night, he handed them flashlights, took them to Treptower Park, an urban oasis in Berlin, and asked them to wander among the trees as if they were looking for something. He captured this quest on camera. But it was only during the COVID-19 lockdown that Dammann turned to these photographs for inspiration for his watercolors. Although his images undoubtedly capture the mood and atmosphere of the pandemic, Dammann refuses to link the meaning of these works exclusively to this specific context. Instead, he depicts scenes of the universal experience of searching - a fundamental human experience that transcends any specific moment in history and remains relevant at all times. The figures in his paintings seem to be on a timeless pursuit, searching for something indeterminate, be it a person, a thing, a solution, a hunting prey, or something else. Such a perpetual state of searching is depicted through eerie scenes that evoke both familiarity and mystery. The phenomenon of these ghostly lights, often seen in swamps or forests and known in folklore for leading travelers astray, serves as a perfect metaphor for this.

The artist's fascination with will-o'-the-wisps and fairy tales is evident in the evocative nature of his work. Fairy tales often revolve around adventures in forests, full of mysticism and the search for a solution. Dammann recreates this atmosphere, where light and shadow play against each other and the natural world merges with urban elements, with the city lights flickering in the background. The series also explores the relationship between forest and city, between nature and urban landscape. Although the lights in his paintings are reminiscent of will-o'-the-

wisps, they often come from modern sources such as smartphones or lanterns. This mixture of old and new, folklore and contemporary life, underlines the timeless character of the quest depicted in his works.

Dammann's artistic path is as multifaceted as his themes. Trained as a draughtsman, he has worked in the fields of analog, and digital photography, video, and classical drawing. While his watercolors are mostly based on photographs, Dammann does not limit himself to a single medium but instead emphasizes fluidity and the interplay of different forms. He avoids imposing a specific meaning on his works, aiming instead for the viewers themselves to interpret the ambiguous scenes based on their own experiences and feelings when looking at them. The artist sees himself as a medium or mediator of images created in response to his environment and brought to life through his painterly technique.

Dammann began his studies at the Kunstakademie Bremen in 1989 and moved to Berlin in 1992 to study under Prof. Karl Horst Hödicke at the Hochschule der Künste/Berlin. After receiving a DAAD scholarship, he began working for the Archive of Modern Conflict in London in 1999 to expand its collection. Dammann has had several solo exhibitions in Germany, at institutions like the Kunstverein Arnsberg (2007), the Kunstverein Konstanz (2009), the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen (2009), the Märkisches Museum (2014), and the Kunsthalle Nürnberg (2015). He participated in the Werkleitz Biennale (Werkleitz, Germany, 1996), the Hybrid Workspace project at documenta X (Kassel, Germany, 1997), MoMA PS1 (New York, USA, 2000), Museum Folkwang (Essen, Germany, 2001), the Württembergischer Kunstverein (Stuttgart, Germany, 2008), the 53rd Venice Biennale (Venice, Italy, 2009), the Centre Pompidou (Paris, France, 2013), the MACBA (Barcelona, Spain, 2015), and several exhibitions at Galerie Barbara Thumm in Berlin. His works can be found in private and public collections in the United States, Canada, and Europe, including the Collection of the German Bundestag, the Collection of the German Federal Government, the Märkisches Museum, the Centre Pompidou, the Guerlain Collection, the Burger Collection, the Sigg Collection, and the Musée de Dole. Martin Dammann lives and works in Berlin, Germany.