

# Anton Kern Gallery

## Jochen Lempert

May 6 – June 21, 2025

Anton Kern Gallery is excited to introduce the work of German artist Jochen Lempert. Trained as a biologist, Lempert photographs plants, animals, and the fleeting traces of natural phenomena with both scientific acumen and a poetic appreciation. His approach unites the questions of a naturalist with reflections on the medium of photography. Always black and white, the photographs depict a diverse range of subjects and genres, ranging from everyday views to abstracted details. Series alternate with single pictures, highly contrasted images with almost blank papers, through which multiple links and subtle associations are woven.

Lempert first began using his 35mm camera, typically equipped with a 50mm lens, while doing academic field work across Europe and Asia. He works exclusively with analogue techniques and prints his photographs on loose weave paper that grants the images a soft focus. Lempert's work has a special material presence underscored by his use of enlargements (i.e. the zooming in and cropping of images, which he produces with very simple homemade developers), his conscious embrace of dust and lint and of blurred and torn edges, and the immediacy with which he presents the images, fixed unprotected on the wall.

For Lempert, the act of taking a picture stands at the very beginning of a complex process that includes collecting and classifying hundreds of index-card size test prints, experimenting with grouping and combining images, and culminates in placing his meticulously generated prints on the walls of the exhibition space. A process that is akin to that of a poet assembling words into meaningful patterns and phrases, or a composer of *musique concrète* who uses recorded sounds as the primary material for new compositions. The artist's unique narrative way of montaging kindred images on the walls clearly references methods of biology (taxonomy and morphology), but is fundamentally influenced by the techniques of experimental film, which Lempert explored during the 1980s as part of the German film collective Schmelzdahin [Melt Away].

Playing freely with conceptual and formal associations, analogies and symmetries, the resulting image sequences accentuate unexpected relationships between plants, animals, objects, and human beings. Lempert allows his images to speak unceremoniously about intricate topics: such as materiality or the states of matter (solid, liquid, gas) and their transformation within the photographic process into image metaphors. Discourses on physiognomic projection and perception, on materiality, and on light phenomena, are gently hinted at.

In the recent publication, Jochen Lempert, *Natural Sources* (2024), Florian Ebner, head of the department of photography at Centre Pompidou, writes:

In the new and completely different climate of our digital age, we find external reality redeemed in the photographs Lempert takes showing the delicate constructions of spider webs, the creative energy of leafcutter ants, or the camouflage and mimicry of insects. These stunning phenomena of a physical world that we commonly refer to as nature, and which Lempert explores from the secular standpoint of a trained biologist, appear today as the building blocks of an alternative blueprint for reality, beyond all the virtual modelling of modern science.



Jochen Lempert, *Bumble Bee's Work*, 2024, Gelatin silver print 9 1/4 x 6 7/8 inches (23.5 x 17.5 cm)

Born in 1958 in Moers (North Rhine-Westphalia/Germany), Jochen Lempert lives and works in Hamburg. From 1980 to 1988, he studied at Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn where he obtained a degree in biology with his research project titled "Studies on the fauna, ecology and reproduction of dragonflies (Odonata) in rainforest waters in Liberia, West Africa." In parallel, he formed the Schmelzdahin [Melt Away] experimental film collective with Jochen Müller and Jürgen Reble, which was active between 1978 and 1989. Together, they explored the possibilities offered by using chemical processes and celluloid film, including the cultivation of bacteria. In the late 1980s, Jochen Lempert turned to photography and produced a unique body of work that was first distinguished in 1990 with the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation Grant for Contemporary Photography, one of the most prestigious awards in Germany. He was also awarded the Ars Viva – Photography award in 1995 (with Thomas Demand, Barbara Probst, and Wolfgang Tillmans). In 2017, he received the Camera Austria Award for Contemporary Photography from the city of Graz in Austria.

Lempert's work has been exhibited extensively over the last three decades, including in recent solo exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, France; Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (2022); CAC Vilnius, Lithuania; Le Crédac, Centre d'Art Contemporain d'Ivry, Ivry-sur-Seine, France (2020); CA2M, Madrid, Spain; Kunsthau Wien, Vienna, Austria (2018); Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2017); Izu Photo Museum, Shizuoka, Japan; Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2016); Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati (2015); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany (2013); Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis; Rochester Art Center, Rochester (2012); Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2010). His work is currently included in an extensive survey exhibition entitled Typologien: Photography in 20th-Century Germany at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy.