

Sies + Höke Galerie

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Press release

Julius von Bismarck: Talking to Thunder

March 31 – May 6, 2017, opening: Friday March 31, 2017, from 7 to 9 pm

In his first solo exhibition at Sies + Höke, Berlin-based artist Julius von Bismarck (*1983) is showing a new body of work that focuses on the natural phenomenon of the lightning strike.

When, at the end of August 2016, it emerged that more than 300 reindeers were struck by lightning on the Hardangervidda mountain plateau in southern Norway, Julius von Bismarck immediately booked the next flight. A chartered fishing boat brought him and his team near; a day and a half later, he stood before the site of a natural catastrophe of historical proportions. The sad trophies of this journey are 130 antler tips of different lengths, sometimes a few centimetres, sometimes up to 30 cm long, which he took from the animal carcasses on the spot. Each individual antler tip, which is mounted in stainless steel for this exhibition and placed on a metal rod at the height of a reindeer head, testifies to the relentless brutality of nature, which is so inexplicable to us.

Julius von Bismarck is interested in various concepts of nature: he confronts the Western dogma of nature as an environment that is in need of protection with the image of nature as a punishing deity, a natural force which invariably devastates and is to be soothed and worshipped. In the north of Colombia, he met the shaman of an Indian tribe, whose people are stricken by the frequent thunderstorms occurring in this region, and who speaks with the thunder as if it were a real person. The title of this exhibition, "Talking to Thunder", stems from this conversation.

Since he was struck by lightning while camping in his car in the wilderness about 10 years ago, von Bismarck has been attempting to tame lightning bolts. He travelled to an atmospheric research lab in New Mexico, to a naval base in Florida, and he visited Venezuela time and again - there is a remote area where there are particularly frequent electrical storms.

The electric current between the ground and the sky can be measured. If it is particularly high, an electrical discharge can be provoked by building a bridge, for example in the shape of a Kevlar-spun copper thread, which is shot into the sky by a small rocket. In a fishing village in the middle of the Venezuelan jungle, and after long experiments, von Bismarck succeeded in capturing several lightning bolts. With a time lapse camera, he has filmed dramatic thunderstorms: lightning perforates the sky, plants sway heavily in the storm, gushes of rain whip the surface of a lake. These recordings, which are silent because of the nature of slow motion, have been set to sound with the artist's own imitated noises. The resulting video can be seen on the third floor.

In a group of photographs von Bismarck additionally shows the lightning striking palm trees, tropical plants and a lake. The lightning bolt itself becomes a sculptural object, almost tangible.

Von Bismarck and his team spent many weeks in the Venezuelan jungle. What at first sight looks like paradise turns out to be the contrary: the humidity is unbearable, the beach is polluted with oil, the water is bacterially and chemically charged. Through binoculars, the rain-soaked tropical plants look like two-dimensional stage props, arranged behind one another – they remind of the western idea of the jungle, which has long been influenced by botanical drawings as well as the paintings of Henri Rousseau. Von Bismarck has pressed and dried the surreal plants of this menacing region, and mounted them on stainless steel plates. Titled "I like the flowers", they are part of this exhibition. Some amazingly beautiful, some brutally deformed, they testify to the long tradition of human intervention in nature.

Julius von Bismarck (*1983) grew up in Ryadh (Saudi Arabia) and Berlin, where he lives and works. Among his solo exhibitions are: *I Like The Flowers*, Kunstverein Frankfurt, Frankfurt (2017); *Objects in mirror might be closer than they appear* (with Julian Charrière), Villa Bernasconi, Grand-Lancy (2016); *Tiere sind dumm und Planzen noch viel dümmer*, Kunstverein Göttingen, Göttingen (2015) and *History of Apparatus*, Kunstverein Arnsberg, Arnsberg (2014). Among his group shows are: *PRODUKTION. made in germany drei*, Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2017); *The 1st Antarctic Biennale*, Antartic (2017); *Deep Inside*, 5th Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow (2016); *Kunstpries der Böttcherstraße*, Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen (2016); *Under Arms. Fire & Forget 2*, Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2016); *Welcome to the Jungle*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2015); *Fire and Forget*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2015) and *Egocentric System*, Art Basel Unlimited, Basel (2015). This year, Julius von Bismarck will receive the Art Prize of the City of Wolfsburg.

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