

Sies + Höke Galerie

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Julian Charrière + Julius von Bismarck: I Am Afraid

3 April – 12 May 2019, Opening: Wednesday, 3 April 2019
in collaboration with Kunstpalais Erlangen, Curator Amely Deiss

"You know these stone bridges, which are under protection."

"Yes."

"Well. We thought one of them should be blown up."

Ten years ago, Julius von Bismarck and Julian Charrière met while studying under Olafur Eliasson at Universität der Künste, Berlin. Since then they have been friends, sharing a studio. Since then they have both become internationally successful artists. Their work each is huge and diverse, has been shown in major exhibitions and received several awards. And since their first collaboration "Some pigeons" in 2012, they occasionally work as a duo on specific artistic projects.

From above mentioned Venetian pigeons, sprinkled with food colors, turned into birds of paradise, to a nuclear polluted area, reflected in the eyes of wild deer, or mountains, craters and jungle thickets, which the artists laboriously adorned with graffiti - the collaborative works of Julian Charrière and Julius von Bismarck deal with the relationship between man and nature in surprising and playful ways.

On the occasion of the artists' first exhibition as a duo, which showed all previous joint projects and opened in late 2018 at Kunstpalais Erlangen, the multi-part work "I must ask you to leave" was created. When the two artists reported to me as curator of the exhibition of their intended project, as quoted above, I certainly first looked at them with surprise. Swallowed. Asked myself what I had gotten into. Was I really about spend a chunk of local museum funds and German cultural subsidies to blow up geological monuments in the USA? When did the two become so radical? At the same time I sensed that this could not be. That they both love nature and that their art goes much deeper than a big bang somewhere in the desert. And indeed, the instant I thought all this came the relief: "But of course we won't do that," said Julian. Julius added: "We're going to replicate nature monuments. And blow up those."

The project comprises three steps:

1. Have several natural monuments recreated in original size in a natural environment, recording every detail on film.
2. Blow up the brand new, manmade nature monuments, film and photograph.
3. Anonymously post mobile phone videos of the explosions online and wait to see what happens.

As simple as it sounds, so spectacular and moving is what you see in the exhibition at Sies + Höke.

First there is the construction of the natural monuments, impressively cinematically documented in the finished video "I must ask you to leave", showing in bombastic three-channel format the sheer and unbelievable effort that it took brigades of people only to build something that looks deceptively real, as if nature had created it completely without human intervention. We see workers trimming polystyrene, building metal reinforcements, balancing cement sacks, raising whole artificial rocks on ropes in burning heat. It takes a long time as a viewer to realize what all these people are up to in this impressive landscape – without being able to avert one's gaze right from the start. When they finally stand there, the stone bridge that seems to have been created only by erosion, the pair of mushroom-shaped rocks, the towering, phallic mountaintop, it's hard to believe that one has just seen workers creating all of this.

The instant of the explosion does not appear in the film after all, but appears razor-sharp in large-format photographs. The beauty and perfection of these seemingly natural monuments and the

shocking power and finality of the apparently human intervention simultaneously and equally affect the viewer.

The third part of the exhibits in the exhibition "I am afraid" will finally feature the international press' reactions to the viral videos of the explosions, shown on several video monitors. Above all, American television stations and newspapers showed and described the videos, speculating on possible locations of the destroyed monuments and surveying experts. Soon the media came to the conclusion that the videos could only be fakes. Digital animation. By professionals definitely. No one had considered the possibility that the monuments actually existed for real - not natural, but man-made, created for the sole purpose of being blown up. For the purpose of raising the very questions that make the exhibition so intriguing both aesthetically and in terms of content. It is a gigantic fairy tale about mankind's hubris in its eternal struggle against nature, impressive and thoughtful.

Text: Amely Deiss

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