

Elger Esser: *Morgenland*

29 March – 21 May 2017

(Preview: Tuesday 28 March, 6–8 p.m.)



Left: Elger Esser, *Enfeh I*, Lebanon, 2005. C-print, Diasec, 142 x 184 x 5 cm (56 x 72½ x 2 in). Courtesy of the artist. Right: Elger Esser, *Salwa Bahry I*, Egypt, 2011. C-print, Diasec, 97 x 124 x 4 cm (38¼ x 49 x 1¼ in). Courtesy of the artist.

Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is delighted to present an exhibition of photographic works by German artist Elger Esser. This exhibition, his first solo show in a public institution in the United Kingdom, focuses on a new series of works, entitled *Morgenland*, created during his travels in the Eastern countries of Lebanon, Egypt and Israel from 2004 to 2015.

Shown for the first time at Parasol unit, the *Morgenland* (morning land) series refers to the concept of the Orient or the East. Rather than reflecting a negative stereotypical 'Orientalism' with its links to cultural colonialism, as discussed by Edward Said in his 1978 seminal book on the subject, Esser's depictions of the Near East aim to convey a sense of reconciliation amidst regional differences and historical issues.

Travelling along the Lebanese shore in 2004 and the Nile between Luxor and Aswan in 2011, Esser photographed the banks of rivers, traditional feluccas and dahabiya sailing vessels, using an 8 x 10 land camera. Captured from a great distance, Esser's calm awe-inspiring landscapes, somewhat reminiscent of the romantic images of faraway lands on old postcards, seem to convey a sense of the infinite. Their quiet and serene beauty, however, is disturbing because it is in such stark contrast to what we know of the ugly conflicts taking place in the region today and how they are generally portrayed in the media.

During a visit to Israel in 2015, Esser created *The Secret Archive of Livi Benjamin, Palestine 1948*, a series of works based on archival photographs that document the existence of ruins in Israel/Palestine during 1948. With this series, Esser aims to present a timeline of conflicts, dating from ancient Roman times to the present day, showing the development and decay of cultural periods. Landscapes are seen as stratifications, layers upon layers of different cultures. The work *One Sky*, 2015, shows two panoramas printed back-to-back on a silver-coated copper plate. One side displays a view as seen from Lebanon, while the other side presents the same view as seen from Israel. Although both scenes are so similar they appear to be the same, they present us with a single location as seen from opposite perspectives.

Nature and the landscape are central themes throughout Elger Esser's photographic oeuvre. Often in muted, sepia or monochromatic colours, his works have a stillness about them that evokes a sense of the sublime. Esser's large-format photographs typically depict European lowlands with his characteristic low horizon lines, pale luminous colours and vast skies, beaches, wetlands or seas. His skilful use of traditional processes, such as photogravure printing, gives his images an intense sharpness, depth and luminosity. Inspired by the literary works of Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust and Guy de Maupassant, paintings of the Romantic period, and early nineteenth-century photography, Elger Esser's works originate from the travels he has undertaken since 1996, across France, Italy, Spain, Scotland, Ireland, the Netherlands, the USA, and Australia.

This exhibition, curated by **Ziba Ardalan**, is accompanied by a full programme of educational events aimed at engaging the public.

Parasol unit appreciates the generous support of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac.

NOTE TO EDITORS

Artist Biography

Elger Esser, born in Stuttgart in 1967, now lives and works in Düsseldorf. He spent his childhood in Rome, surrounded by the fabulous art treasures of the Renaissance and the Baroque Period. In the 1990s he studied with the famous Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Kunstakademie (Academy of Art), Düsseldorf. With sensitive and precise observation, Elger Esser captures the exact moment at which the character and atmosphere of a landscape are revealed. He has developed different groups of works, including vedutas (views), landscapes, heliogravures, and postcards of shipwrecks. In 2016, he was awarded the prestigious Oskar Schlemmer Preis by the state of Baden-Württemberg, and presented a major exhibition at Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Germany, and Landesgalerie Linz, Austria. He has had extensive solo exhibitions at Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, 2009; Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, 2010; Institute of Modern Art Nuremberg, 2013; the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, Tampa, 2014; and monographic exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, 2016; and the Landesgalerie/Linz, 2017. In 2016, Schirmer/Mosel published a book about his heliogravure series *Combray*. Esser's works are exhibited in numerous institutional collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Kunsthau, Zurich; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; and FRAC|Fonds régional d'art contemporain, Paris.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Founded in December 2004, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is a registered educational charity and a not-for-profit institution that operates purely for the public benefit. Every year the foundation organises four challenging and thought-provoking exhibitions of works by international contemporary artists working in various media and arranges other artistic projects. The foundation also engages with the public and its neighbouring community through a full programme of educational events. In its genuine mission to serve the public, the foundation does not bear the name of its founder, and its exhibitions do not derive from any particular private collection. Admission to all exhibitions at Parasol unit is free of charge. Thanks to its innovative model between private funding and public support, one of London's most vibrant contemporary art spaces has come to exist and thrive.

Free Admission
Parasol unit
14 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW

Opening hours
Monday, by prior arrangement
Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Sunday, 12 – 5 p.m.

Directions: Tube to Old Street or Angel
Buses: 43, 205 or 214 via City Road

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