

## **WILDERNESS**

**NOVEMBER 1, 2018–FEBRUARY 3, 2019**

### **WALL PANELS OF THE EXHIBITION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

While untouched natural spaces have largely disappeared from the Earth's surface, the theme of wilderness seems to be burgeoning in the images and aspirations of our time. Against this background, this exhibition is dedicated to the captivating idea of wilderness and the diverse links between wilderness and art. It presents works by 34 international artists from 1860 to the present day.

*Wilderness* traditionally refers to areas that are inaccessible to humans and are left to the forces of nature. In this respect, in Western history the term has established itself above all as a counter-model—to distinguish it from the domain of the cultivated, the domesticated, and from civilization as such. By the 18th century, in the wake of the Enlightenment and early industrialization, the Western notion of wilderness as a threatening danger zone beyond human control changed to that of a refuge beyond the civilized world. In line with the notion of the sublime, wilderness also became an aesthetic category that most notably manifests itself in the spectacular stagings of the uncontrolled forces of nature in the art of Romanticism. This turning point continues to shape our conception and the conventions of depicting nature to this day, and it remains an effective reference in the artistic examination of wilderness.

In the 20th century, wilderness in the wider sense came into focus in art. As the epitome of the transgression of cultural norms and boundaries, it became a symbol of free creative processes and of the precarious outer fringes of society, which the artistic avant-garde sought to penetrate. Images of wilderness developed into a metaphor for inner, psychological processes, and wild nature itself became an alternative site of artistic creation. In the recent past, in which the relationship between wilderness and civilization reversed, and wild areas exist only behind fences in designated nature reserves, images and concepts of wildlife have again increasingly become the focus of art. Artists go on expeditions to unknown regions, challenge common fantasies of a nature uncontrolled by humans, and devise their own self-regulating worlds after the end of civilization.

Pursuant to this development, a thematic path through the exhibition highlights individual facets and connecting aspects of wilderness and art in associative dialogues between contemporary and historical works. Beginning with the discovery and contemplation of distant, untouched nature, the path leads to the wilderness as a site and object of artistic creation. It penetrates into inner wilderness regions, reaches locations of confrontation between wilderness and civilization, and finally leads to the examination of new, alternative models of a wilderness beyond nature. The exhibition encourages a debate about wilderness as a phenomenon that initially appears obsolete in today's "age of man." On closer examination, it turns out to be a complex cultural construct that is intimately intertwined with art and its images, and continues to unyieldingly exist within this resonance space.

## **THEMATIC SECTIONS**

### **Distant, unspoiled nature**

The perception as well as the depiction of wilderness as a remote place that has not been conquered by man continues to be shaped by the legacy of the Romantic era. In the early 19th century, untamed nature was stylized into an alternative world beyond human scope and imagination, reifying certain recurring motifs—high mountains, precipitous cliffs, dark forests, waterfalls, and such. Artists have recently begun to again draw on this romantic inventory. Photography in particular has established itself as a preferred medium to further stage and critically challenges the illusion of a sublime, unattainably distant nature. This part of the exhibition is dedicated to depicting wilderness in the sense of unspoiled, wild natural settings and juxtaposes contemporary works with selected historical photographs.

### **In the wilderness**

Whether in search of a site of inspiration away from society or to implement a site-specific project: artists in urban art metropolises are frequently drawn to wild, remote regions, exploring them as unknown spaces of experience, or even declaring them permanent workplaces. In particular since the 1960s, for many artists untouched places far removed from civilization—such as the desert—harbor the promise of new creative scope beyond the established art world and traditional studio-based practice. The intense and frequently physical examination of the untamed forces of nature results in works that do not primarily depict wilderness, but embrace it as an integral part. Specific aspects such as light, emptiness, materiality, growth, impermanence, and transformation predominate.

### **Wilderness within us**

Since the early 20th century, images of the wild no longer exclusively point to faraway places, but in a metaphorical sense also to our inner world. After growing criticism of the belief in progress of European civilization, artists of various avant-garde movements—such as the Surrealists and later the group CoBrA—focused on hidden and forgotten dimensions of human nature. They combined the ideal of an original state of nature formulated in the 18th century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau with Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, arriving at a utopia of artistic creation freed from cultural norms and rational control. As the flip side to behavioral standardization by the conventions of civilization, wilderness became an ambiguous metaphor for inner states and art based on drive and loss of control.

### **Wilderness or civilization**

Western school of thought has always been based on the categorical separation of nature and culture, wilderness and civilization. The position of animals remained ambivalent, moving between these poles from the intimate mirror image to the radical opposite of human beings. In contemporary art, animals (especially nondomesticated ones) thus appear as a recurrent motif challenging established notions of wilderness and civilization. Yet the anthropocentric view of the animal is increasingly under scrutiny and has undergone a critical revision in recent years. Against this background, the notion of the wild beast deeply rooted in our culture as the "other" in relation to human beings cannot be maintained as such. In contemporary art, it therefore tends to

be approached indirectly in most cases—in reaction to existing historical as well as media images.

## **Artificial wilderness**

At a time when places untouched by humans have largely disappeared from the Earth's surface, the traditional notion of wilderness in the sense of unspoiled nature is a matter of debate. Today, artists therefore all the more acutely address the question of how wilderness should be rethought as an artistic category in the face of humankind's global influence on Earth's ecology. It constitutes the basis for possibilities and notions of new, alternative models of wilderness in an age "after nature." They can take the shape of post-human or post-apocalyptic visions of the future of a world free from human intervention, or they might create complex secondary natural spaces as a stage for self-regulating processes. The latter may not be completely controlled or directed, even by the artists that created them.

## **ARTWORKS**

### **Darren Almond**

For his photographic series *Fullmoon*, Darren Almond travels to wild regions of the world devoid of human beings to photograph them at night in the moonlight. He tends to follow the paths of historical expeditions, such as, in this case, Charles Darwin's journey to South America. The artist uses overwhelming landscapes and the motif of the full moon as the set pieces of a Romantic pictorial tradition that become the background for the critical examination of our current relationship with nature and wilderness.

### **Hicham Berrada**

Hicham Berrada works at the interface between art and science. He begins, in the manner of a laboratory researcher, with chemical processes and reactions, creating fantastic, landscape-like scenarios that are left to develop on their own. In *Ghost #1*, a daisy from the garden of the Villa Medici in Rome is dissolved in acid. It takes on unexpected sculptural forms that suggest the birth or new beginning of a world before or after humankind.

### **Bisson Brothers**

Until the 19th century, the high mountain massifs of the Alps were the last indomitable wilderness in Europe. Even after the first ascent of the highest alpine summit in 1786, Mont Blanc was still called "the icy" or "the cursed" mountain. The summit photographs by the Bisson brothers combine a renewed scientific interest in the topography of the Alps with the discovery of the aesthetic dimension of those once terrifying altitudes.

### **Julian Charrière**

Swiss-born Julian Charrière places the Alps as a symbol of cultural identity at the center of his work *Panorama*. His photographs refer to the historical panoramas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On closer inspection, however, the depiction proves to be a model arranged by the artist. Charrière's snow-

capped Alps were created in 2011 on a construction site in Berlin and expose the idea of nature untouched by man as both a delusion and an illusion.

*Metamorphism* is Julian Charrière's term for the hybrid rocks he presents as valuable finds of a future archeology. Originating from the fusion of artificial lava with electronic waste from data carriers and computers, they simulate a new anthropogenic primal matter. The artist critically reflects on our relationship with natural resources, while his transformation process points to an open future.

### **Ian Cheng**

For several years, Ian Cheng has been developing so-called live simulations. In doing so, the artist merely defines a set of parameters— a virtual ecosystem and characters— that he then leaves to develop on its own. *Something Thinking of You* shows a virtual creature between plant, animal, and artificial life in the midst of a scenic environment. The result is not planned and predictable, but emerges directly from the wildly rampant, self-perpetuating scenario.

### **Marcus Coates**

Marcus Coates examines the relationship between humans and animals and challenges established notions such as man being superior to other living beings. He is interested in “gray areas” and transitions from one reality to another. *Red Fox* and *Goshawk* place the individual in the habitat of wild animals and show the artist himself: dressed in red and crawling on all fours, he becomes a fox in an open field. Crouching in the distance on a tall tree, he transforms into a hawk.

### **CoBrA**

Karel Appel, Constant, and Asger Jorn are among the main representatives of the artist group CoBrA. Against the background of the experience of a devastating war, the movement founded in 1948 rallied against the achievements of Western civilization. The participating artists proclaimed the liberation from academic traditions and cultural norms, and sought a new form of artistic authenticity. An integral part was the critical examination of the animal as an elementary dimension of human nature.

### **Tacita Dean**

The largest magma field in North America lies smoldering beneath Yellowstone National Park. The devastating consequences that an eruption would have for humanity have been the subject of numerous documentaries and disaster films. For *Quatemary*, Tacita Dean was inspired by fantasies of a world after humankind. She created a fictitious landscape from photographs, which she combined with handwritten notes to develop a postapocalyptic setting. Yet the historical albumen prints she uses seemingly place the events in times past rather than in the future.

### **Mark Dion**

Mark Dion presents the wolf, like a life-size exhibit from a museum of natural history, as a transportable didactic example of our contradictory relationship with wilderness. Hardly any other

animal ignites such heated debates about contemporary conservation. One measure by the Yellowstone National Park is in fact reminiscent of Dion's mobile wolf: the purposeful eradication of the predator there during the 1920s destroyed the balance of the ecosystem. Canadian wolves were therefore resettled in this American region in the 1990s.

## **Jean Dubuffet**

Jean Dubuffet is known as the founder of Art Brut and an advocate for a notion of art based on instinct and untamed wilderness. The fundamental quest for originality was expressed in his geological view of the landscape, as well as his keen interest in the nature of soil. In the mid-1950s, a sojourn in the southern French town of Vence inspired the artist's group of works *Tableaux d'assemblages*, expressing his fascination with overgrown gardens.

## **Max Ernst**

In the 1930s, Max Ernst frequently worked with the motif of the jungle. This symbol of wild and untouched nature in the oeuvre of the Surrealist turns into a complex metaphor: for hidden urges and desires, for the dark side of nature, and also for the creative process itself. While *Nature at Dawn* clearly carries erotic connotations, *The Joy of Life* appears to anticipate the self-destructive forces of European civilization.

## **Joan Fontcuberta**

The strictly formal composition, reminiscent of popular botanical photographs such as Karl Blossfeldt's *Art Forms in Nature* (1928), and the pseudo-scientific names might be quite deceptive. However, Joan Fontcuberta's *Herbarium* does not depict natural species, but rather artificial assemblages: from material that the artist finds along the way, he creates new species that appear to have grown out of the consequences of ecological catastrophes and genetic manipulations.

## **Luke Fowler**

Bogman Palmjaguar is the self-chosen name of the eponymous protagonist in Luke Fowler's film. Bogman, who lives in seclusion in Scotland's moorland Flow Country, takes action against his diagnosis as paranoid schizophrenic. He sees his fate as exemplary for the institutionally organized exclusion of anything that defies the norms of society. As a conservationist, he therefore feels strongly in solidarity with the threatened wilderness of Scotland and the rare species of wildcat whose existence he sees as much under threat as his own.

## **GUN**

In East Asian culture, the term wilderness refers to more than a geographical concept and may also be understood as a withdrawal from institutional and social power structures. In the actions of the Japanese artist group GUN, founded in 1967, wilderness is the deliberately chosen periphery where artistic creation can unfold beyond these conventions. For the performance *Event to Change the Image of Snow*, the artists transformed the permanent snow of the remote Niigata Prefecture into abstract color fields.

## **Camille Henrot**

The untamed monster and the white woman at his mercy, Beauty and the Beast—an archetype of Western cultural history. Camille Henrot condenses the myth of the giant gorilla King Kong and his love for the human female, Ann, into a single motif by layering footage from Merian C. Cooper's original *King Kong and the White Woman* (1933) and the remakes by John Guillermin (1976) and Peter Jackson (2005). The surreal collage manifests the iconic moments of the conflict between civilization and wilderness.

## **Pieter Hugo**

In 2005 and 2007, the South African photographer Pieter Hugo portrayed a group of traveling showmen in Lagos, Nigeria, referred to as Gadawan Kura or Hyena Men. They earn their living among other things by presenting hyenas and monkeys to an audience. In addition to the contradictory image of wild animals in the midst of urban spaces, Hugo examines the relationship of these people to their animals: whether trusting or brutal, ultimately, the economic situation of the group of men takes priority over the welfare of the animals.

## **Per Kirkeby**

In 1963, geology student Per Kirkeby traveled with polar explorer Eigil Knuth's expedition to Pearyland in Greenland. Kirkeby examined rock and coastal formations— however, not simply as a scientist. He also created a series of etchings there, as he did again on his many subsequent visits to Greenland. In the course of these journeys, Kirkeby transformed his geological sign system of "signatures," which he used to record topographical features in his logbooks, into an increasingly abstract artistic imagery. At the same time, his atmospheric etchings reveal the harsh beauty of Greenland.

## **Jacob Kirkegaard**

The sound installation *MELT* immerses listeners in the sounds of crunching and melting ice masses that Jacob Kirkegaard recorded on several expeditions to Greenland. The rumbling and splashing of the ice and the dystopian atmosphere of the installation are reminiscent of the existential challenge posed by climate change. The familiar trepidation in the face of a sublime, overwhelming nature is joined by the overwhelming realization that human influence on nature is irreversible.

## **Joachim Koester**

The photographic series *Bialowieza Forest* documents a mythical place. The forest of the same name on the Polish-Belarusian border dates back to the 8th millennium BCE and is considered the last surviving example of a European primary forest. Formidable and glorified, this nature reserve had always been the scene of political interests and conflicts. Joachim Koester traces the forest with all of its notional imagery back to its material conditions beyond any romanticization.

The praying mantis, an insect whose female occasionally consumes the male during copulation, is regarded as the epitome of the cruel instinctive forces of nature. Numerous Surrealists became fascinated with it as a meaningful image for the wild, unsophisticated forces of the human psyche.

In *Idolomantis diabolica*, Joachim Koester also addresses the mysterious creature's ability to blend into its surroundings, thus developing an uncanny presence.

## Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack visited the extreme expanse of sand and ice deserts in the 1960s to explore the nature and energy of pure light. In 1962/63, he created *Sahara Project*, for which he installed an "artificial garden" of steles, cubes, and reliefs in the North African desert that reflected the glaring light and transformed it into immaterial sculptures. Mack and the artists' group ZERO, which he co-founded, saw in such spaces far away from the centers of art the realization of a vision for a new beginning of art after World War II.

## Ana Mendieta

The interventions that Ana Mendieta undertook for her *Siluetas* series in Mexico's and Iowa's natural environments are minimal and intimate: she pressed or burned the contours of her own body into the ground, or outlined it using natural material. Instead of appropriating wilderness in a colonial gesture, she tried to return her body to this enduring nature. Mendieta described her spiritual union with the earth as an attempt to overcome the feeling of cultural uprooting that afflicted her after fleeing from her native Cuba.

## Richard Long

Since the 1960s, British artist Richard Long has explored wilderness as a creative space. The starting point for his artistic interventions in remote areas around the world is the elementary human activity of walking, of collecting and organizing found natural materials. Works such as *Lines* and *Circles*, which are returned to the wilderness after having been documented, emerge as timeless images for the confrontation of humankind with the natural powers of the world.

## Helmut Middendorf

Helmut Middendorf belongs to the generation of the Neue Wilde (New Fauves), who revived figurative painting in Germany in the late 1970s. In large-format expressive images he reveals his experiences in the vibrant city of Berlin. In two nocturnal scenes, he also focuses on urban wilderness. The rhinoceros at Berlin Zoo appears rather moribund, while urban natives perform ecstatic dances.

## Richard Oelze

German artist Richard Oelze is regarded as one of the important painters of Surrealism. From 1933 to 1936 he stayed in Paris and maintained contact with Max Ernst and the Paris Surrealists. He shared their interest in dreams, visions, and the exploration of the subconscious. *Archaic Fragment* reveals a disturbing inner landscape, with a grotesque, mixed entity reminiscent of animal, plant, and human forms floating at its center. It appears to allude to wild, primitive impulses that lie dormant within the human psyche.

### **Georgia O’Keeffe**

In the 1930s, Georgia O’Keeffe discovered the barren, misanthropic landscape of the American Southwest as a source of inspiration. In 1949 she moved from New York to New Mexico. An essential aspect of her fascination for this wild, lonely region was the brightness of the light. In *From the Plains II*, she depicts the vastness and shimmering light of the Texan desert as an abstract spectacle of colors and an immaterial, sensual experiential space.

### **Gerhard Richter**

*Tiger* is one of Gerhard Richter’s early photographic images in which the painter transferred templates from newspapers and magazines to the canvas. The blurring that is characteristic of his images suggests a fleeting impression, but also emphasizes the illusory nature of the image. In a double game of deception, a louver like visual filter is layered across the striped coat of the wild cat, thus highlighting the inaccuracy of images conveyed by the media that tend to shape our reality.

In the late 1960s, Gerhard Richter dedicated a series of paintings to the theme of mountains and alpine views. He consciously addressed the—in the German context—rather historically charged motif of romantic wilderness in order to challenge our perception of nature as a socially domesticated place. Instead of a sublime peak experience, *Himalaya* depicts a topographical aerial view of the highest mountain massif on Earth, oscillating between pathos formula and visual experiment.

### **Briton Rivière**

British animal painter Briton Rivière devises a vision of the Arctic as a sublime place untouched by humankind. The artist never actually visited this distant region, but instead based his account on dramatic expedition reports and studies of the polar bears at London Zoo. *Beyond Man’s Footsteps* refers to the tradition of Romantic landscape painting. At the same time, it attests to Rivière’s interest in Charles Darwin and his theories on evolution, and the relationship between animals and humans.

### **Henri Rousseau**

With his famous jungle paintings, self-taught painter Henri Rousseau created sensational and at the same time rather unrealistic compositions. *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* transfers a scene from the savanna to an imaginary jungle where flora and fauna are assembled in the manner of a collage. Rousseau had actually never left Paris; his visions were entirely informed by images from illustrated newspapers and visits to the city’s botanical and zoological gardens.

### **Lin May Saeed**

Lin May Saeed links her artistic work with the political fight for animal rights by rallying against their suppression by humans and calling for a relationship between them on equal footing. In the series *The Liberation of Animals from their Cages*, circus and farm animals are unchained and,



on a humorous note, literally released from their cages. In Saeed's works, the liberation of animals constitutes the beginning of the harmonious coexistence of all living things.

### **Frank Stella**

*The Grand Armada* belongs to Frank Stella's extensive *Moby Dick* series. Over a period of 15 years, the American artist referred in his work to Hermann Melville's novel published in 1851, telling the dramatic story of the capture of a whale. Each of the 135 chapters of the book resulted in a work. The relief shown here refers to a passage depicting the pursuit of and struggle with a large herd of sperm whales where the human hunters become the hunted.

### **Thomas Struth**

For his series *Pictures from Paradise*, between 1998 and 2007 Thomas Struth traveled to forests across the globe, from Australia and North and South America to the Bavarian Forest. The photographic "all-over" does not draw our gaze into the depths of the landscape, but instead directs it toward the overwhelming variety of detail. Struth stages the Brazilian jungle as untouched and devoid of human beings, thereby tapping into the collective visual memory of Western cultural history where wilderness embodies a lost paradise.

### **Carleton Watkins**

In the era of the pioneers around 1860, Carleton Watkins began to photograph the newly accessed regions of the American West. In the spirit of Romanticism, his painterly views of Yosemite Valley depict a seemingly untouched nature. Watkins's paintings not only to some extent shaped the myth of the American Wild West but, in 1864, also helped place Yosemite, as the first American wilderness area, under inviolable protection.