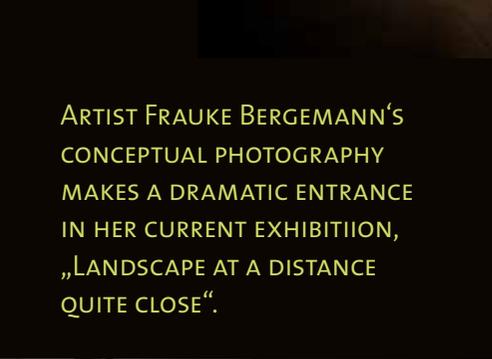




MENTAL MAPPING

GERMAN ARTIST BERGEMANN
ADDS UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE TO
PHOTO LANDSCAPES

by Alex Priest



ARTIST FRAUKE BERGEMANN'S
CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY
MAKES A DRAMATIC ENTRANCE
IN HER CURRENT EXHIBITION,
„LANDSCAPE AT A DISTANCE
QUITE CLOSE“.



Landscapes as an art genre in general are pretty boring. The green plants, the vastness, the clichés of Bob Ross, and the implied narratives associated in the “changing of the seasons.”

Yet German photographer Frauke Bergemann's exhibition Landscape – a distance quite close at the Garden of the Zodiac until Jan. 21, borrows this seeming pedestrian subject, pictorializing evidence that there is something left to discover in (the) landscape.

Living in Berlin, Bergemann consistently seeks refuge at her dacha (garden house), which is nestled about 40 miles outside the city. Set in a sublime conservation area in the former German Democratic Republic, the space remains virtually untouched.



The unique landscape heritage of the site includes rocky residue and lakes left by glaciers along with a small unremarkable grouping of trees of which even Bergemann remarks, “is really nothing.” Ironically, this piece of nothing is co-opted into the leading role for her solo exhibition.

A foundation for these photographic studies is sociologist Lucius Burckhardt's query, “where does landscape begin?” But where does a “nothing” landscape “begin?” and what exactly is (a) “landscape”?



The word “landscape” is not easy to describe and is usually defined by a vague jumble of words that reaches at a simile for “nature”. The description generally varies by person, yet colloquially refers to most things outside that are not man-made.

THE GARDEN OF THE
ZODIAC GALLERY
1042 HOWARD STREET
OLD MARKET PASSA-
GEWAY, OMAHA (NE)
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www.frauke-bergemann.de

For a more art historically minded individual, landscape might also reference a view or scenery. While these are true, to an extent, landscape theorist Denis Cosgrove adds that landscape is a “way of seeing that is individual and related to the exercise of power over space.”

Unpacking Burckhardt and Cosgrove’s theories, optics and landscape are crucially linked. The eighteen photographs tacked to the walls of the Garden of the Zodiac are strategic portals into Bergemann’s Germanic prospect.

The controlled views of her nothing landscape are not stationary or static but rather psychedelically transient. Her meditative strolls found this peculiar patch of nothing, and her photographic practice absorbed it.

Highly technical, the photographs are constructed with Bergemann’s small Fugifilm camera in an almost anti-panoramic methodology. Starting from the ground and moving up, then left to right, Bergemann snaps endless photographs without a tripod. Combining elements from each slightly off kilter photograph (in Photoshop, but not with the ‘photomerge’ tool, and no she does not use her iPhone’s pano feature), the resulting assemblages are all encompassing – encouraging the viewer to step into the foreground (ala Burckhardt).

Within the photographs, our brain takes Bergemann’s lead combining what is right in front, and what is at a distance to synthesize a path for our eyes and brain to follow through the “chaos”.

“Eyes are always changing perspective, and the brain puts all the images together until, in your mind, the illusion takes place that everything is sharp and is taken from only one perspective,” the artist said.

Winding around the gallery, it is very easy to reminisce on the scenery thinking, “oh that reminds me of Fontenelle Forest,” and that’s part of the point. Through their generic content, these photographs have elements and details that shake us back to past memories.

In our minds, these photographs create a hyper-reality by combining what we see in Bergemann’s photographs and our personal pastoral memories via a mental storyboard.

“Wassermoos im Schwarzerlenbruch I” (Water Moss at black alder forest I) pragmatically articulates the artists mystical tendencies and techniques. Raw water cascades from the foreground up into a shifting horizon through an aggressive green camouflage of tree limbs.

The water amplifies Bergemann’s shape-shifting optical methods with an almost 3D effect. There are unexpected elements hidden within the thick warbling paper. Most of the collaged elements are pin-sharp, yet an occasional an out-of-focus leaf quickly takes the spotlight. This Gaussian blur ruptures the macro by telling secrets to the artist’s process.

Showing a dirtier side to the artist’s pristine world, “Großer Baum” (Big tree) uncovers booze bottles littering the swamp devoid of any obvious critters. It is hard to focus anywhere in this large print, as there is too much to focus on. Patterns merge and the architecture of the forest creates a claustrophobic oppression.

For “Farn im Schwarzerlenbruch” (Fern in black alder forest) a cathedral of trees and omnipresent ferns manufacture a cacophony of visual noise. Overwhelming saturation hide a discernable path. Oddly, these voracious ferns provide respite in managing the frenzied scene.

Another photograph, “Schnee im Schwarzerlenbruch II” (Snow at black alder forest II) is printed at nearly 1:1 scale on wallpaper, and articulates her sensitivity to capturing time. With obvious references to Burckhardt, a frosty foreground dips to the floor. Showing another condition of the site, the black alder trees, metallic water, and crunchy leaves are literally at your feet, suggest a starting point.

Each deadpan photograph unfolds slightly over each season. With a continuation of the artist’s monoto-

nous pictorial language, it is hard to sloganize the seasonality as anything important to the viewing experience or even sensational.

The Garden of the Zodiac is overstocked with photographs of landscape, and there is not a lot to say or add. They are highly personal, repetitious, and according to the artist contain “no big concept.” In the end, it is just a mirage trees, some still water, and maybe some snow.

At first glance, the story of the maker’s marks and landscape history are far more interesting than the actual photographs. Yet, in revisiting Burckhardt and Cosgrove, Bergemann’s vistas are nearly incomplete unless re-viewed by gallery goers - who infuse subjectivity into this “nothing” landscape.

These photographs challenge the eye to maintain focus on the immediate, while the actual view, namely way of seeing, is inward. Whether the viewer is seeing Fontenelle Forest or a black alder thicket in East Germany, the notion remains the same. Landscape is a highly constructed narrative meticulously built with the same complicated and random techniques as Bergemann’s über banal photographs.

Bergemann has captured a landscape thousands of miles away, and with individualized memories make us feel as if it is right in our backyard. The landscape that is at a distance quite close is, in fact, the memories being held in our brains about landscape. Bergemann’s scenic overture is site specific, yet their architecture is universally designed.

Her tarot card reading shows that landscape first begins internally through a discovery that is personal and biased on individual perceptions. Nothing is certainly something.

Alex Priest is Exhibition Manager at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha