

Fairy Tales and Myths – Nature as a Staged Space

(On the artistic work of Cecilia Szabó)

Cecilia Szabó's imaginative, surrealist photographic images tell us stories about a familiar and yet alien mystical world. The photographs play with the boundaries between this world and nether-world, truth and fairy tale, light and shadow, reality and illusion.

Nature and, in particular, the woods as a magical symbol play a key role in the works, as they are the natural stage of many photographic images. In fairy tale language, the woods stand for wilderness and untouched beauty. For us human beings, it is a projection area of our desires, fantasies and visions. However, nature is not only the home of an imaginative fairy tale world, but also constitutes the elementary basis of our livelihood. With their strong reference to nature and the forces of nature, the photographic works establish a relationship between the human being, the mind and nature. This gives rise to an almost theatrical visual unit of fairy tale, myth and vegetation. Though invisible, the human being – who, with all his longing for ease and a life untouched by civilisation, withdraws from the daily routine – is still at the centre of the photographs. He takes flight to nature in order to escape from the metropolises with their mental and emotional constraints and confusions. He is in search of rootedness. Through getting in touch with the elemental forces and recollecting naturalness, he can find a way back to himself.

Dance and Asian Art of Motion Performed in Nature as a Public Space

For purposes of implementation, the artist always works in nature, often alone or together with dancers or actors and actresses, employing costumes, drapery, masks and, last but not least, the own body. Dance and improvised motion are integrated into her work. This physicalness is deeply rooted in Asian culture, as Cecilia Szabó first practised yoga over a period of 10 years and then – for 8 years until this day – Tai Chi.

Often, she finds the “piece of nature”, which she chooses for her works and utilises as staged space in the course of the creation process, in the parks of the great metropolises. Urban forests are also used, as are remote woods in Germany and abroad. Here, nature as a public space undergoes transformation for a short period of time, which vanishes once again however after the works of art have come into existence.

In choosing the right place, the site's typical interplay of light and shadow, the colours and the peculiarities of the vegetation are the crucial factors. However, the artist is also fond of including the (positive) traces, which are left behind in nature by people from the large cities and bear witness of something archaic. For instance, small tent frames and ritual circles can be found in the urban forests of large cities, which are built from branches and attended at regular intervals by children as well as by adults.

Time as a Mirror for the Eternal Cycle of Growth and Decay

Motion and the play with exposure times are two elements finding their way into the photographs and placing the aspect of time into the focus of attention in an almost imperceptible way. The temporary stagings in nature also emphasise the eternal process of growth and decay, which already represents an immanent part of nature. The phantasmal figures of the photographic images rise and vanish at the same time. Nothing exists. We hold emptiness in our full hands. What is here is there, shadow was light only a moment ago, and what is now has already died away ...

Why Photography?

The images explore the possibilities of describing reality through the medium of photography. Irrational photographic images emerge that stand in strong contrast with their process of production. On the one hand, photography is a medium raising associations of the "rational and technological". At the same time, the contrast between technology (here: the process of origination) and the irrational work, which forms the result, reflects the contrast between a highly technological, rational and analytic society and the vulnerable human being.

The photographs are taken with a digital reflex camera. However, stagings in the woods and forests do not have a virtual nature, but are always real – although only on a temporary basis, i.e. for the period of the staging process.

The Seasons

Equally important are the seasons, which are included into the works because of their characteristic light and typical vegetation and hence exert major influence on the images. By no means does the artist leave it to chance at which point in time certain photographic series are produced. Here as well, the unity of nature and work, i.e. unity between the season and the topic of the work of art is decisive, since the seasons are able to symbolise fugacity and death (autumn, winter) or stand for new beginning, fertility and life (spring, summer).