

"Les échos de la nature" / Echoes of Nature**Omar Alessandro - Magdalena Fernández - Colin Guillemet -
Pieter Laurens Mol - Ana Roldán - Martina Sauter**

15.3. - 17.4.2014

Opening: Friday 14.3.2014, 6pm

This group exhibition continues annex14's loose series of thematic presentations.

"Les échos de la nature" raises the question of the presence and significance of "nature" in contemporary works of art. Generally speaking, nature and art have always been a controversial couple. For a long time nature was considered to be art's signpost. Mimesis, imitation of nature, is a concept whose philosophical, aesthetic and theoretical implications are still relevant in art and culture today. Yet the insoluble paradox is that when we speak of nature we are actually only speaking about nature; attributions are all there is. We idealise, deconstruct, paraphrase, romanticise or copy it. This applies to both older art history and where nature is used directly as material - for example, in Land Art in the 1970s, when Richard Long laid out his stone circles in the wilderness. It also applies to the 1990s, when Damian Hirst preserved a tiger shark in formaldehyde and shocked viewers. And it still applies today. Nature is always a cipher, a metaphor, within a comprehensive sign system, which we use to represent the world, reality, and to comment on and interpret it.

As hinted at by the title "Les échos de la nature", the focal point here is not nature but its "echo" as a metaphor, a cipher, a symbol of society and in the art context.

Rainbow (2011) by **Colin Guillemet** (*1979, F) is a series of seven Polaroids, while *The Parrot is the Message* (2011) is a colourful sock sitting on a bare branch. Both works conjure up a bright bouquet of ideas. They stage artistic implementation as a magic trick and appeal to viewers' imagination, casually implicating them as accomplices. The artist seems, with almost childlike delight, to be using simple means to breathe an art-philosophical dimension into natural phenomena, vegetables and parrots.

A bird's nest is for hatching eggs in. At least that is what birds do there. Presumably an empty nest in an art space, complete with a little bell, awakens a longing for birdsong, for woods and meadows. **Omar Alessandro** (*1979, CH/I) entitles a work of his dated 2013 *Where I'm Calling From*, leaving open the questions of who is calling whom from where; who is missing, seeking or would like to talk with whom. Similar allusions to safety, emptiness, loss and lostness are also to be found in *Berceuse* (1985), a photograph by **Pieter Laurens Mol** (*1946, NL). In it we see an empty bird's nest, but also painted orange rectangles that contrast with the organic and so evoke further layers of meaning. Like the pot with the miserable rose tree under the arm of the artist, who at the same time is poking his head into an ivy shrub. Does the pot in *Transfusion* (1984) stand for the head, and if so, just how artificial would the thought-shoots be that spout from human imagination? The relationship between civilisation and nature, even in its most domesticated form, is also a theme in *Withering Paradisiaca* (2013/14) by **Ana Roldán** (*1977, MX/CH). In this contemplative work, nature, or rather what is apparently natural, becomes a set of socially multifaceted signs. On the one hand, there is a process which in itself is natural: the slow wilting of a banana blossom that invites us, like a Baroque *memento mori* still life, to think about transience.

On the other hand, we know bananas from supermarkets, a context that inevitably brings the idea of profit-optimised food and economic systems into play.

In a film, the setting for a scene makes a significant contribution towards characterising a figure, an action, a mood. Citations from film-scenes and the collective memory of films are means that **Martina Sauter** (*1974,D) likes to use in her photographic works. *Sterns Residence* (2006) and

Pool (2013) make clearly opposing references to "nature". One is a rural-rustic scene with a pile of wood, the other a luxurious villa-like pool with exotic plants. Both are in a way stereotypes that speak about naturalness, the rural idyll or the simple hard life. At the same time, domesticated nature is turned into a status symbol. Given that we always regard photographs as interrupted time, there is undeniably a before and after not shown in the image but contained in it as an atmosphere. Martina Sauter skillfully masters filmic suspense in photography. The tension in her works invariably conjures up ideas of social and societal dreams and nightmares.

When the *Ortalis Ruficauda*, a bird typical of Venezuela, croaks, a colour grid moves in rhythmic harmony. In the video *2pmTGO10*, 2010 by **Magdalena Fernández** (*1964, VE) it is as if a veil is lifted for a few moments, enabling an unimpeded glimpse of another reality. On the surface this is an easily recognised game which, through carefully chosen pointers, gives rise to reflection that is both poetic and critical: reflection on the visual and geometrical abstraction so important for Venezuela, and proceeding from there to the question of the possible significances or influences of a rhythm borrowed from nature.

The different conceptual considerations in all these works take nature into account as a multilayered sign, be it the opposite of something, a binding element, a symbol or a metaphor. Yet it is not nature as such, but the above-mentioned concept of nature that, as part of a meaning-giving linguistic system, can engender a thinking that makes great inroads into a complex and contradictory everyday that is both artistic and social.

Elisabeth Gerber