AKINCI

ENIGMATIC | Flower – Wood – Growler, 2024

Axel Hütte

portfolio with photos by Peter Tijhuis

Installation view Axel Hütte, ENIGMATIC | Flower – Wood – Growler, AKINCI, 2024

ENIGMATIC | Flower – Wood – Growler

AKINCI is proud to present Axel Hütte's most recent photo series of flowers along with photographs of landscapes in Antarctica and Italy in his solo exhibition *ENIGMATIC | Flower – Wood – Growler.*

The photographs of Axel Hütte (Essen, 1951) are part of a long tradition of landscape photography. Photographing landscapes is closely associated with travel and the appropriation or 'discovery' of unknown places. Since the late nineteenth century, photography has played a crucial role in the practical documentation and exploration of the earth. With the growth of tourism, the use of Google Maps and the spread of visual culture through the use of the internet, the landscape has slowly become part of a global visual consumer culture. As everything now seems to be photographed and thus 'discovered', there is little mystery left, a certain disenchantment of the world. Axel Hütte's photographs bring back an element of mystery, a form of alienation rooted in reality.

This element of mystery manifests itself in a certain absence in Hütte's landscapes. There are no people or animals in his landscape photographs, and no signs or remnants of culture. The photos have no references to history and show no traces of human civilisation. The absence emphasises the presence of nature.

This absence, or in some cases presence of a dominant 'nothingness', leaves the viewer nervously wavering between wanting to see something and not being able to. Hütte's photographs of Antarctica, for example, show an overwhelming monochrome sky above floating rocks of ice (growlers), dominating the landscape. A dark void that offers no resistance to the eye.

Another recurring theme in Hütte's work is reflection: a photograph of a reflection in the water and photographs on silver plates that reflect the world. Besides this, he explores the idea of reversing, as in a mirror, but also by using the negative of a photograph as the final product.

Hütte's *Flowers* series continues a technique he uses in his landscape photography. He isolates a single natural phenomenon. Within the theme of his bridges, Hütte does this by using the structure of a bridge as an architectural frame, in other photographs by choosing a particular point of view, but also by applying the technical frameworks of photography and using cut-outs. Hütte limits the space, removes something from its context and places it on a stage that serves for exercise and experiment in perception. A larger context stays concealed. The cut, loose flowers are literally separated from nature and taken out of their natural environment. From an art historical perspective, *Flowers* belongs to the tradition of still life painting rather than landscape painting.

Using the negative of the photograph, the colours of the flowers are reversed, giving them an unpredictable character. Where today we are surprised by little, as all natural beauty seems to be documented, these flowers come as a surprise. The black background refers to Baroque still lifes, where this was applied to bring out the colours of the flowers. In Hütte's photographs, this is again a flat 'nothingness' that doesn't refer to anything and makes the viewer aware of their gaze. The background is broken up by the faded, smoky traces that float around the flowers. These are their negative shadows. Although it is clear that these are shadows, the flowers take on a mysterious character, giving them an eerie appearance, like ghosts of themselves.

Axel Hütte's photographs make the viewer question their own perception and contemplate the technique of reflection and reversion. In fact, not much has been altered in the *Flowers* series, only the colours. The flowers are not so alienating that they cannot be real, but they do raise questions. The photos open a door to questioning perception and interpretation. It creates an awareness of the manipulation of an image, which is certainly relevant in these times where this is done with great ease and quantity.

Lemaire_Channel-1, Antarctica, 2017, inkjet print, framed, 135 x 165 cm

Lemaire_Channel-1, Antarctica, 2017, inkjet print, framed, 135 x 165 cm

Gerlache_Strait-1, Antarctica, 2017, inkjet print, framed, 135 x 165 cm

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Flower_m_co_7928, 2022, metallprint, framed, 83 x 66 cm

Flower_m_co_9711, 2021, metallprint, framed, 83 x 66 cm

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left: Flower_3691, 2020, ditone print, framed, 205 x 155 cm

above: Flower_m_co_2192, 2023, metallprint, framed, 83 x 66 cm

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Paradise Bay, Antarctica, 2017, inkjet print, framed, 115 x 140 cm

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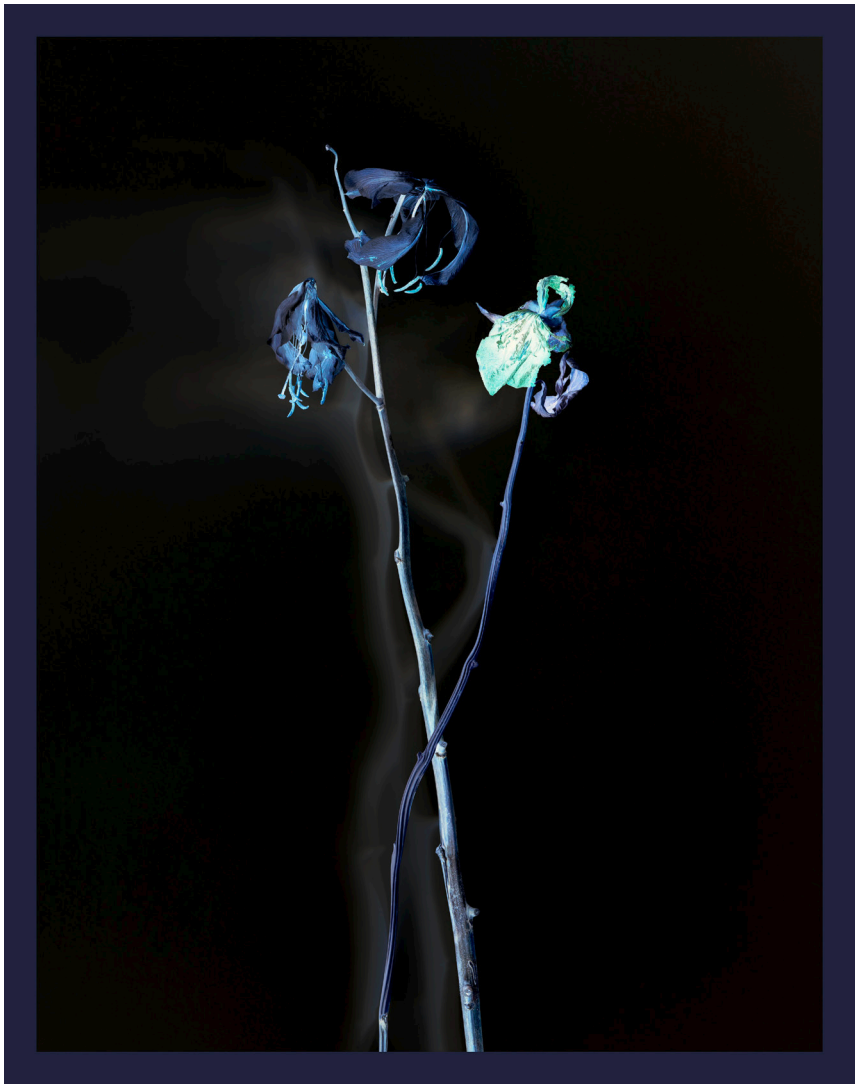

Flower_m_co_8299, 2021, metallprint, framed, 83 x 66 cm

Flower_m_sw_0547, 2021, metallprint, framed, 83 x 66 cm

Anne Wenzel, Reality Check (Malieveld), 2023, ceramics, metal, 122 x 135 x 47 cm

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Marignano I, 2017, ditone print, framed, mirogard glass (UV), 170 x 205 cm

Marignano II, 2017, ditone print, framed, mirogard glass (UV), 170 x 205 cm

Bibliography

The text from this press release is partly based on the text “Spectres of Sights” by Julian Heynen from the book *Magical Flowers - Imperial Rooms*.

Julian Heynen, “Spectres of Sights”, in *Magical Flowers – Imperial Rooms*, published by Axel Hütte, Düsseldorf, 2021, pp. 3 - 14 (German); pp. 25 - 41 (English, translated by Fiona Elliot

Biography

Axel Hütte (1951, Essen, Germany) studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the late 1970s. His approach to photography is influenced by his time there studying under Hilla and Bernd Becher. Their instruction has made a mark on a group of notable contemporary photographers—the Düsseldorf School, as they are known—including Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Struth, and Thomas Ruff. Recent solo exhibitions by Hütte include Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, TR (2022); Kunsthalle Krems, Krems, AT (2018); Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf, CH (2018); Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, DE (2017) and Josef Albers Museum, Quadrat Bottrop, DE (2017). He had group exhibitions at Fondazione Brescia Musei, Brescia, IT (2023); Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, DE (2020); Huis Marseille, Amsterdam, NL (2018); Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK (2016); Museo San Telmo, San Sebastián, SP (2014); La Galleria di Piazza San Marco, Venice, IT (2014); Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid , SP (2011); Schirmer/Mosel Showroom, München, DE (2010); IVAM, Valencia, SP (2009); Fundación Telefónica, Madrid, SP (2008); Henie Onstad Art Centre, Høvikodden, NO (2006); Waddington Galleries, London, UK (2006); Palacio de Velázquez, Madrid, SP (2004); Fundación César Manrique, Lanzarote, SP (2004); Museum Kurhaus, Kleve, DE (2000). Hütte currently lives and works in Düsseldorf.