

Elger Esser

5 Jul – 8 Sep 2018 at the Rosegalerie in Santa Monica, United States

18 JUNE 2018



ROSEGALLERY is pleased to announce *Paysages Intimes*, an exhibition of new works by Elger Esser. *Paysages Intimes*, Esser's fourth exhibition with the gallery, will be on view from 5 July 2018 until 8 September 2018.

Each landscape presented through the lens of Elger Esser appears almost limitless. Boundless to time and detached from the specificities of place, Esser's landscapes ache with a romantic longing for places both familiar and foreign. In Esser's most recent body of work, *Paysages Intimes*, the artist turns intimate exposures into luminous landscapes. In a departure from his well-known, large-scale landscape photographs, Esser produced this series of landscapes on small sheets of silver-coated copper plates. The luminous surface of the plates subtly shines through the image, allowing light to play an active role in these scenes. While the light moves in the present, the views themselves harken to a distant yet familiar past. In each scene lay echoes of human existence: buildings hidden in trees and on distant islands; bridges void of pedestrians; boats tipped in receded riverbeds. Yet, where this vacancy lays, a subconscious sense of remembrance emerges. Without a figure in the landscape, the spaces lend no clues that they exist in the present day, yet their existence as photographs speaks to their present tense. Throughout each hollowed landscape, Esser's romantic vision voyages into timelessness, memories, and absence.

As a student of Bernd Becher at the Düsseldorf School of Photography, Esser expresses the enormity and seemingly objective vision of the Düsseldorf School; however, he departs from his predecessors in his embracement of romantic vision. In his ongoing pursuit to traverse the boundaries of photography in its fine art context, Esser employs classical photographic techniques to echo more traditional forms of art; *Paysages Intimes* explores this further as Esser prints the photographs on copper plates, the medium of choice for Baroque painter Adam Elsheimer. Captured throughout Northern France, the romantic and emotional views illuminate Esser's ongoing and boundless vision of the landscape.

Elger Esser was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1967 and grew up in Rome, Italy. Esser studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Düsseldorf under Bernd Becher from 1991 to 1997. His works are represented in the following museum collections, among others: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Centre Pompidou Paris.

Beyond the bombs: Elger Esser's Middle Eastern landscapes - in pictures

Elger Esser's photographs celebrate the serene beauty of Egypt, Lebanon and Israel, but still subtly acknowledge the ongoing conflicts in the region

Fri 31 Mar 2017 02.00 EDT



Saida I, Lebanon, 2005

Elger Esser's photographs of the Middle East show off the area's mysticism, away from headlines about war and violence. An exhibition, *Elger Esser: Morgenland*, is at Parasol unit, London, until 21 May



Enfeh I, Lebanon, 2005

Esser was born in Stuttgart in 1967, before growing up in Rome, and studying photography in Düsseldorf under Bernd and Hilla Becher.



Elger Esser, Salwa Bahry I, Egypt, 2011

But where the Bechers - and their acolytes in the Düsseldorf School such as Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth - photographed German industry and cityscapes, Esser focuses on older, even timeless subjects. Publisher Lothar Schirmer called him a 'heretic' of the Düsseldorf School as a result.



Elger Esser Salwa Bahry I, Egypt, 2011
One Sky I, (Liman, Tyre) Israel, 2015

For these shots of the Middle East, Esser travelled to Lebanon, Egypt and Israel between 2004 and 2015. His shots in Israel are based on archival shots of ruins by an unknown photographer in 1948 - Esser quietly draws a line between conflicts of the present and past.



One Sky I, (Liman, Tyre) Israel, 2015

He is influenced by Romantic paintings and 19th-century photography, and inspired by the likes of Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust and Guy de Maupassant



El-Kab II, Egypt, 2011

His unashamed search for beauty is, he acknowledges, out of step with many of art's critical thinkers. 'When they see something beautiful, they are confronted with their dull, workaday life. They can't handle it,' he has said



See Genezareth II, Israel, 2015

'I can't help but generate beauty. If you want to create something timeless, something removed from the flow of time, then you need to search for things which endure time'



Shivta, Israel, 2015

He has become one of Germany's most successful photographers, with work held in the collections of museums like New York's Guggenheim and Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam

ELGER ESSER'S PHOTOGRAPHY - a new romanticism?

November 16, 2014



No one would be surprised to learn that one of Germany's most respected contemporary photographers was a student of Bernd Becher at the Academy of Arts in Dusseldorf. After all, the Dusseldorf School, under Becher and his wife Hilla, has produced photographers such as Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer and Thomas Struth. What might be surprising is that the photography of Elger Esser, who studied with Becher in the 1990s, seems at first glance to be totally different from that of his famous colleagues.

While Andreas Gursky and other photographers from the Dusseldorf School bring a conceptual eye to the motifs to be found in urban and industrial buildings, interiors,

houses and modernity in general, Esser's images are rooted in history and a sense of time passing; and if the analytical conceptualism which emerged from the Becher's relentless documentation of industrial structures marked the work of Dusseldorf alumni, Esser has concentrated on landscapes, seascapes and lakes, villages and old buildings. His photographs evoke a melancholy evocation of time past and childhood memories. He seems to have replaced conceptualism with a return to romanticism.

Esser's embrace of beauty in photography seems to support this view. With his commitment to the traditional crafts of wet darkroom photography and fine printing, he says that he 'can't help but generate beauty. If you want to create something timeless, something removed from the flow of time, then you need to search for things which endure time'. Esser's evocation of past worlds draws heavily on his love of literature - Proust, Maupassant, Fabre, Flaubert, Mann. Of these, Proust has been a continual source of inspiration and *Combray (Giverny)*, currently on display at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts (FMPA) in Tampa illustrates his primary artistic concerns in drawing on Proust. Indeed, *À la recherche du temps perdu* probably summarises well Esser's photographic quest.

But Esser does not stand for some uncritical return to the cult of beauty. Romanticism was a genuine revolution that challenged the classical past driven by the 'soul within', a reversal of the enlightenment emphasis on the laws of the natural world. Enlightenment rationalism did not seem to offer an adequate explanation for the pace of change and its effects. This reorientation away from natural laws to the artist was as profound as the other revolutions of the time. And Esser has embraced the revolutionary potential of the romantic mindset when he says that 'Romanticism was a movement which shook-up very elementary things; it was an insurrectionary movement'. Reacting in his turn to the conceptualism of Dusseldorf, Esser launched a radical quest for the 'landscape within'.

Raised by a German author and French photojournalist, Esser 'grew up with German values, but with a certain Italian and French spirit.' This changed his perspective on the world and time. It led him in particular to realise that Germany's adoption of modernity in the wake of 1945 seemed to fracture the country's relationship with the past.

Today he lives in Germany 'in order to retain a sense of longing for the other' - in this case, France, a country in which he regularly travels, photographing extensively in an effort to create a kind of 'mind atlas' of the country. He seems to find in France

that relationship with the past which Germany has lost, a sort of counterpoint to Germany's relentless, if forced, modernism. 'Landscapes are like states of mind,' Esser explains, 'Everyone carries a landscape within them, one they naturally idealize.' (1)



And so we find in the *Combray* series currently showing in Tampa a collection of images of a France past - unpopulated scenes of villages, buildings and fields which bring to mind a feeling of gentle, quiet decay. The photographs are beautifully printed on large sheets of robust hand-made paper which hang on the walls unframed. Esser's photographs are printed as large-format heliogravures, a painstaking and high-quality etching process developed towards the end of the nineteenth century which produces remarkably fine details and subtle gradations of tones. Combining traditional craft printmaking with photography leads Esser to describe his practice as that of an artist using photography rather than that of a photographer. Their very materiality points us towards a past world.

All the photographs are monochrome. The severely restricted range of tones of each offers a wash of midtones which suggest a scene pulled from memory rather than the product of a precise and impersonal machine called the camera. Is it not the case that when we think back to the places of our childhood the images we see are vague and generalised, lacking in detail but charged with atmosphere? Esser's flat-toned photographs mirror the process of memory recall, the way in which we pluck out impressions from the millions of details which we encounter during our lives.

The scenes which Esser presents are unpopulated; not a single figure beyond a few horses appear in the images. Again, isn't this how we remember the places of our past as the broad shapes of buildings and towns vaguely delineated? In our mind we reshape reality - romanticism, perhaps, but a process which exposes the revolutionary potential of the romantic mindset.

In the end it may be that Esser's photography is not quite so different from that of his mentors and contemporaries in Dusseldorf.

In her notes accompanying the FMPA exhibition, Joanne Milani Cheatham suggests that for Esser 'it is as if you can take humans temporarily out of the landscape, but you can never erase the marks they have left behind in their stead.' With his love of nineteenth century literature and acute sense of its relationship to the history of photography, it would not be surprising if Esser had Atget's photographs of old Paris in mind. Atget's long exposure times resulted in people - up to that point the main subject of photography - blurring into indistinct forms in his photographs or even disappearing completely.

This was one of the features which attracted the surrealists and, later, Walter Benjamin to Atget. In Benjamin's view, Atget's photographs of deserted Paris streets and alleys were like 'the scenes of a crime', signposts without direction. Everyday objects of ordinary experience were revealed by photography as strange and unsettling: all was not as it appeared at first glance. In his *Little History of Photography* written in 1931 Benjamin said that Atget 'looked for what was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift' his photographs running contrary to the 'romantically sonorous names of the cities; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.'

In a similar way, the photographs in Esser's *Combray* series evoke the past by representing it much as our own mind processes might do. In the process that

reality is reshaped. The romantic palimpsest of Esser's photographic techniques turns into a process of radical reappraisal of the past - a goal surely as conceptual in its way as that of the Bechers and their followers.

The curator for the Elger Esser exhibition *Combray (Givernyy)* is Zora Carrier who has arranged for Esser to give a lecture on his work and the *Combray* series in March. Keep your eye on the FMPA's website for dates and more details.

(1) All quotations by Esser taken from Jochen Kürten, 'Elger Esser Captures the Landscapes of Longing', *Deutsche Welle*, 11 July 2012 available at <http://www.dw.de/elger-esser-captures-the-landscapes-of-longing/a-16085726>

Elger Esser: Combray, October 4 - March 29, 2014

Florida Museum of Photographic Arts
400 N. Ashley Drive, Cube 200
Tampa, Florida 33602

Tampa Bay Times



WINNER OF 10 PULITZER PRIZES

Photograph exhibitions showcase nuance of black and white



Lennie Bennett, Times Art Critic ▼

Wednesday, January 21, 2015 10:30am



Elger Esser, Combray (Pressy-sous-Dondin II) Frankreich (Bourgogne, 71 Saon-et-Loire), 2011, heliogravure on handmade paper. Courtesy of the artist



Elger Esser, Combray (Saint-Romain-de-Lerps), 2010, heliogravure on handmade paper. Courtesy of the artist

Black and white photographs are studies in contrast, explorations of tonal nuance between the extremes of light and dark. Two exhibitions at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts provide excellent examples of two 20th century fine photographers working in the black and white tradition, along with a demonstration of how varied that tradition is.

We could consider both eloquent landscape artists. Ezra Stoller (1915-2004) worshiped at the altar of mid-century American architecture, also called modern architecture, and his crisp, elegant documentations are odes to a specific time and style. Elger Esser (1967-) takes us out of time with his haunting, atmospheric portraits of the French countryside.

Stoller was the best and most fervent apologist for modern architecture, spreading its gospel to a larger public who didn't have access to its finest examples. His talent even made a few of the buildings look better in a photograph than in actuality. It could be a tough sell with its reductive aesthetic that embraced straight lines and 90-degree angles, or sweeping curvilinear forms that could seem alarmingly futuristic.

Chamberlain Cottage in Massachusetts, a collaboration between Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius, is the most direct and simple example of its streamlined approach. The home is composed of two boxes, one the house and the second a screened porch. Stoller mitigates its severity using shadows cast from an open window and a drainpipe.

The Sarasota School is a famous regional interpretation of the architecture, and Stoller chronicled it thoroughly, especially work by its most famous practitioner, Paul Rudolph, who went on to international fame. Rudolph and his fellows were sensitive to the climate of west-central Florida and used designs that elevated the buildings and provided lots of cross-ventilation. Most of his designs in Florida were residences, many of which have been destroyed. Stoller's photographs of them are beautifully composed. The Healy "Cocoon" House, designed in collaboration with Ralph Twitchell, is a good example. In one photograph, Stoller puts the deck and one side of the house in the bottom right of the frame. About two-thirds of the picture is devoted to the surroundings: a sweep of sand, a dinghy moored in the water, a stand of Australian pines and the sky. It doesn't give us much of the house itself but a great deal of how it functions.

Stoller's use of context is also superb. He photographs a boxy modern house so that we see, across the street, a Spanish bungalow. An elaborate facade of classical columns looks frivolous when viewed through the windows of the resolutely stern Equitable headquarters designed by Pietro Belluschi.

This show includes all the greats, including Phillip Johnson, Mies van der Rohe, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Louis Kahn and Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright is the rogue of the bunch, using common elements but adding a lot of flourishes — restrained, of course, but elaborations eschewed by his colleagues. We see them in the notched beams of Taliesin West, the glorious spiral gallery in the Guggenheim Museum, and the decorative quality and texture of the exterior of his iconic Falling Water home.

Elger Esser's photographs have the look of old prints. He uses the photogravure (also called heliogravure) process, which was developed in the late 19th century and is so painstaking, time-consuming and expensive, it's rarely practiced. And, he makes them in large format — even more time-consuming. But the process creates subtle gradations of tone that could never be achieved in a simpler printing process.

They are gorgeous. And haunting. Like much of Esser's work, this series is devoid of human presence. Wondering how he managed to photograph an entire village without a single sign of life (when the village is not an abandoned, crumbling wreck) is almost a distraction from the beauty of the work itself. He names each small French village in the titles, but all fall under the common rubric Combray, a fictional one invented by Marcel Proust for his opus, *Remembrance of Things Past*. There is an almost complete stillness to the scenes, with occasional exceptions such as a stream's flow, the blur of flowers as the breeze moves them or of horses as they bend their heads to graze. We know these are occupied places: Who has just mown the grass to create a path to a manor's entrance?

I don't know if the curator intentionally scheduled these shows simultaneously, but they are a terrific pairing.

Contact Lennie Bennett at lbennett@tampabay.com or (727) 893-8293.

>>Review

Ezra Stoller: Photographing Modernism

Elger Esser: Combray

The exhibitions are at the Florida Museum of Photographic Art, 400 N Ashley Drive, Tampa. Stoller continues through April 30 and Esser through March 29. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, and noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Docent tour Sunday at 2 p.m. Suggested donation is \$10 adults, \$8 seniors. fmopa.org or (813) 221-2222.

Photograph exhibitions showcase nuance of black and white 01/21/15 [Last modified: Wednesday, January 21, 2015 10:29am]

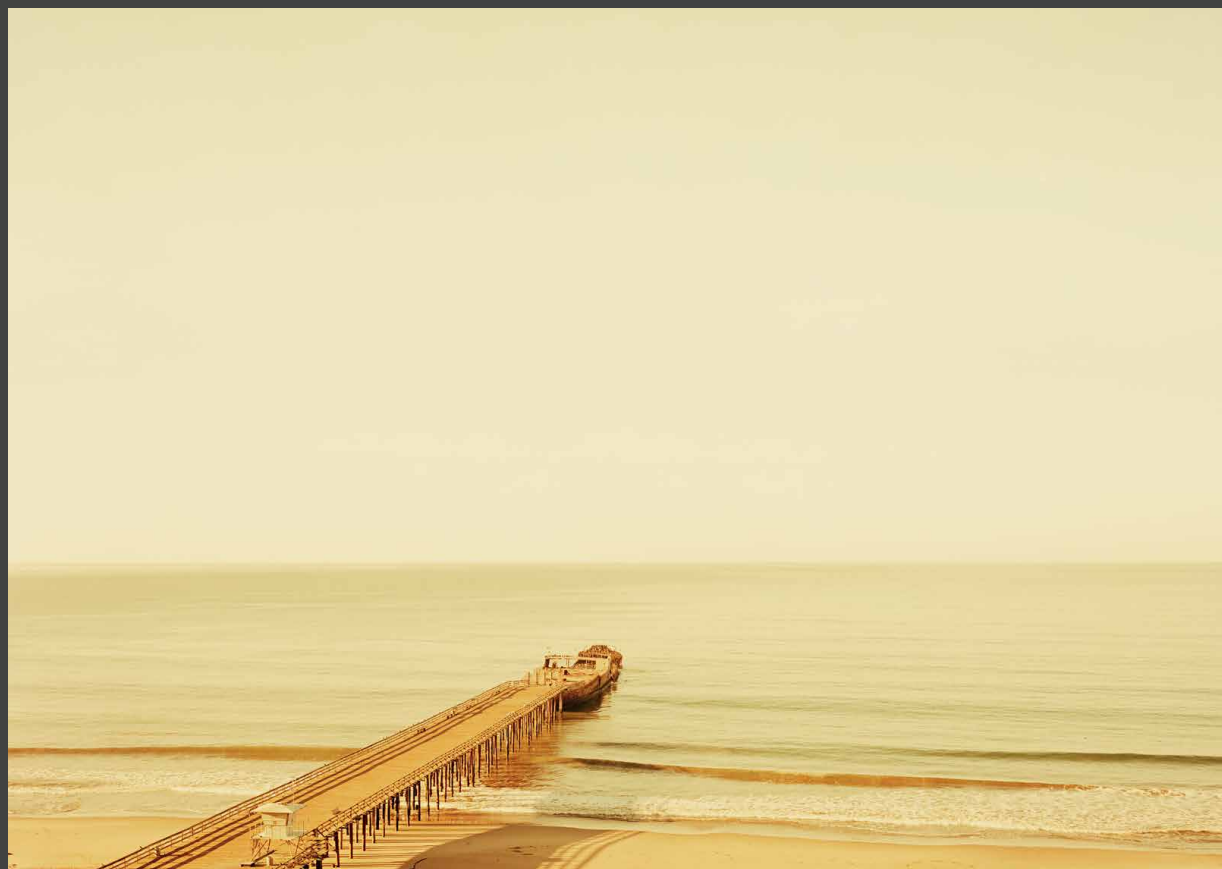
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ELGER ESSER
Portrait by Nicolas
Cattelain



la Baie du Mont Saint Michel II, Frankreich, 2012
C-print on Diasec face
72 1/2 X 96 1/2 in. (184 X 245 cm)
EE-338
Elger Esser: © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, NY



Sublime of Landscapes

風景選中了Elger Esser，讓他遊歷在攝影當中，一個城市、前人留下的種種蛛絲馬跡，在他的鏡頭前構成一幅幅充滿詩意的動人畫面。

Queenie

Seacliff II, USA, 2007
C-print on Diasec Face
72 1/2 X 94 7/8 X 1 5/8 in.
(184 X 241 X 4 cm)
EE269
Elger Esser: © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, NY

Translated by Hane Toqi

Elger Esser 是一位著名的杜塞爾多夫攝影師，他最廣為人知是那些大幀彩色風景照作品。1967 年出生於德國，Elger 在羅馬長大，1991 年移居到杜塞爾多夫，並入讀杜塞爾多夫藝術學院，與同樣為著名攝影師的 Bernd 和 Hilla Becher 一起學習。

Elger 足跡遍及歐洲各國，主要遊走於法國、意大利、西班牙等地，捕捉歐洲低窪地區、海灘及海岸線，從而創作出那些色彩斑斕的風景照。那些地球上最簡單的元素，土地、天空和水，很多時被忽略，卻是人類存在的最佳憑證，如在船上、車上和路上。柔美、靜謐的色彩主體，經長時間曝光處理，照片往往揭露出一抹浪漫與抽象的美態。Elger 的作品經常被拿來與 17 世紀的歐洲風景畫及 19 世紀的相片相提並論。他的作品不單是對大自然之美的展現，同時也是時間和人民歷史的描述。

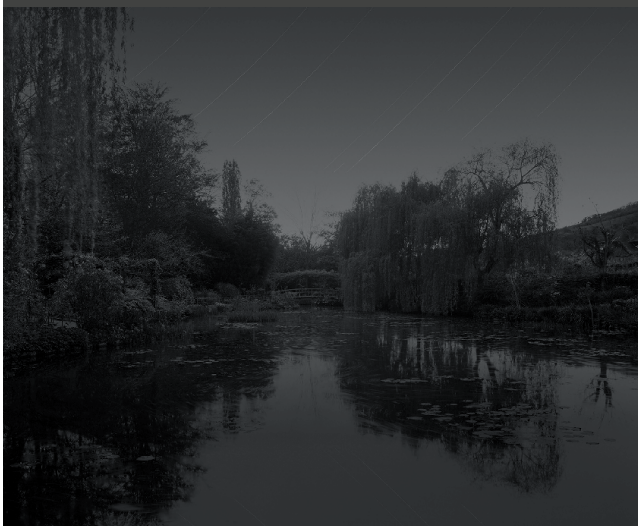
可以介紹一下你的背景嗎？你認為攝影的吸引力在哪裏呢？

我想人們對攝影感興趣，都是建基於他們在找尋、探索。我們未必知道在尋找甚麼，只是我們知道有些東西失去了，在生活中沒有得到的一些東西，所以尋找。

你以拍攝風景照片而聞名，作品也常被拿來與古典風景畫相提並論，你認為這是在和你在意大利成長的經歷有關，並因此影響你的創作風格嗎？為甚麼以風景作主題呢？

我沒有選擇以風景為題，是它們選擇了我。但是，我可以肯定說，在羅馬長大的童年背景，深深地影響我，羅馬是一個非常綠化的城市，你可以將那些豐富的遺蹟當成神話般的花園，也可以簡單地將之視為風景，並從中解讀羅馬。儘管如此，它就是一個城市，我尤其喜歡欣賞那些前人留下的種種，並逐漸轉化成動人的風景。

FOCUS



Giverny I Frankerich, 2010
C-print, AluDiBond, Forex
72 1/2 X 90 1/8 X 1 5/8 in.
(184 X 229 X 4 cm)
EE-295
Elger Esser: © 2015 Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New
York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn
; Courtesy of Sonnabend
Gallery, NY

Tracy-sur-Mer II, 2006
C-print on Diasec face
55 3/4 X 72 1/2 in.
(141.5 X 184 cm)
EE-228
Elger Esser: © 2015
Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York / VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn ;
Courtesy of Sonnabend
Gallery, NY



你曾遊歷過整個西歐，來拍攝風景和都市的風光，創作多圍繞時間和地點。可以說一下你的旅行經歷，及當中如何影響創作的過程？有沒有最喜歡的地方？你是如何選擇要拍攝甚麼呢？

假如你展開一趟遊歷之旅，（而其真攝影本身也是一種遊歷），你會有一刻疑惑，不知道甚麼時候回去，或者是否永不回去。在我們生活之中有一種對影像的渴求。具體來說，我會把所有的遊歷視為是一趟行程，所有創作項目視為同一項創作，在每一幀圖片也看出所有風景。每件事情也是息息相關，環環相扣在一起的。時至今日，我也不認為遊歷回來後開始工作，是真正地回來了。當然我知道那些是我急切要去找尋的東西，但是好像擁有配對的直覺一樣，當我看到事物的時候自然意識到是否可行，在遇見一些人的時候便可以輕易地察覺到。

你的部分作品靈感來自西方文學，如《Combray》系列就是由 Marcel Proust 的《In Search of Time》（追憶似水年華）啟發而來。另一個更早期的系列，於 2014 發布的《Cap-Antifer - Etretat》，就是由 Guy de Maupassant 為 Gustave Flaubert 百多年前描繪的手繪草圖而來。你可以告訴我們更多關於這兩個系列的事？流行文學又如何影響你的作品？

當我在看到 Maupassant 與 Flaubert 的故事，我便立即聯想到一個年輕學者與繪畫大師的情景，在我的現實世界中也有相同情況。大師 Flaubert 請年輕的 Maupassant 幫忙，描繪出埃特雷塔沿岸的風光，而作為回報，Maupassant 也從這分享中得到提升自己藝術天才的機會。故此，從上諾曼地到埃特雷塔這一段路極富象徵性意義，我決定必須要走一趟。《Proust》系列創作的情况亦一樣，但是 Combray 於現實並不存在，只有在想像之中，我無處可去，唯有在腦海中描繪出來。

你的作品細膩而帶點洗水的色彩，賦予一種浪漫、靜謐、微妙的含蓄感。它們時而沉鬱、念舊。你如何塑造這種氣氛？你希望讀者如何詮釋？

每件藝術創作均是來自對主觀情況的客觀演繹。我們稱之為感觀，欣賞的人有時也要一樣，來詮釋作品的神髓。有時可行，有時不，不過說回 Proust，他有能力令觀賞者以為他描繪中的童年，是自己童年般的一樣實在。

我們來談談技巧，你大部分的作品，均以傳統攝影器材及技巧來拍攝。你也會使用數碼相機嗎？你對傳統及數碼攝影有甚麼想法？



Combray (Merry-sur-Yonne)
France, 2008
Hellogravure auf Büttenpapier,
122 x 139 x 6 cm (framed)
Elger Esser: © 2015 Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York
/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Courtesy
of Sonnabend Gallery, NY

我接受過攝影課的教育，也要學習不同的技巧，後來我在學習藝術的時候，我用了大部分的努力來把這一切都忘掉，才可以隨心所欲地創作。技巧在這個非常複雜的創作之中，不過是其中一環而已，我在適當的時候用上所需的東西。

在部分的作品中，我們看到你用上黑白照，例如 Giverny 系列中，在晚上以長時間曝光來拍攝莫內的花園。你可以解說一下這件創作嗎？你如何看黑白照與彩色照片？

在吉維尼 (Giverny) 的時候看到莫內的塑像，當下我被震憾住了。於是，我決定晚上時份來拍攝它的黑白照，以最遠的距離，讓效果出來很不一樣。有時候我甚至覺得，在晚上他是在看著我的，因為在黑暗中我看穿了他的秘密。

你最近的創作，是在 Garden of Ninfa 的彩色照片，有部分是日落的景色。以長時間曝光拍攝出一種柔美、靜謐的樣子，可以介紹一下嗎？

Garden of Ninfa（寧法花園）是我兒時一個不可觸及的國度，我對它充滿幻想與渴望，卻無法接近。現在我終於有機會一親它的芳澤，我有種感覺，這裏一定是自然幻化精靈的傑作，唯有此，才可以令自然成為如此美不勝收的景色。

你下一步的工作進展如何？

生活給予我創作的靈感，好的人讓我有機會去了解他們。法國將會繼續在我的創作中出現，而今年我卻會着力在澳洲及以色列等地。新的地方給我更多可能性，去擴展視野，同時也為原有的創作帶來良好的進展。 📍

Roscoff I Frankreich, 2008
C-print on Diasec Face
70 7/8 X 94 1/2 X 1 5/8 in.
(180 X 240 X 4 cm)
EE-256
Elger Esser: © 2015 Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New
York, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn,
Courtesy of Sonnabend
Gallery, NY





Ninfa - (Soso), 2013
Directprint, Alu Dibond, Shellac
79 7/8 X 101 1/8 X 1 3/4 in. (203
X 257 X 4.5 cm)
EE-353
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