

MELANIE SMITH***María Elena***

30 Aug. - 13 Oct. 2018

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present the fifth solo exhibition by Melanie Smith, who was born in Poole, England in 1965. Since 1989 she has lived and worked in Mexico City. She is staying in London for several months from July 2018 on.

Over the years Smith has developed an ambitious artistic repertoire manifesting in various forms of expression such as video installation, painting, sculpture and performance, which she brings together or even overlaps. Her central themes around the relationship between abstraction and perception, irrationality and chaos in the midst of urban life and the natural world as well as social-philosophical questions are illuminated from many sides, supplemented like a mosaic and taken apart again by different media. At the exhibition Smith is presenting her latest group of works *María Elena*. On show will be a one-channel video installation, a series of small-format paintings in oil and acrylic on canvas as well as a selection of works on paper.

The title *María Elena* refers to a mining town in the northern part of the Atacama Desert in Chile which was settled in the 1920s due to its high nitrate deposits for the production of saltpetre. Once owned by the New York Guggenheim family, the town was named after the wife of the first mine director. In her video Smith creates a very intimate portrait of this region in a series of sometimes very concrete and then poetically abstracted film stills. From views of the impressive wide desert landscape from a dizzying bird's eye view there is a sudden switch to close-ups of rust-red sand dunes, animal inhabitants of the area or abandoned mining facilities. Green-blue water in which today's residents swim unconcerned alternates with rectangular blasting fields that surprisingly explode. The calm and poetry of pollen floating in the heated atmosphere and the beauty of sparkling stars are thrown out of kilter by images of destruction and the unsettling architecture of a post-industrial landscape. The separate scenes are supplemented by old black-and-white photographs of former miners.

In past projects Smith already investigated the reality of an industrial modern Latin America. In this respect the film is thematically linked to earlier work groups such as *Fordlandia* (2014) and the installation *Xilitla* (2010), which was first shown in 2011 at the 54th Venice Biennale. One step ahead, or rather looking back, it is also a reference to the strong influence that the colonial past has had on certain Latin American regions: colonialism as father of the modern industrial age which in turn paved the way for the increasing damage to the environment in the era of globalisation.

The theme of the video is further developed in the second exhibition space by a series of paintings and drawings. The small, almost square formats are arranged singly or as diptychs and show figurative as well as abstracted scenes around *María Elena*, but can nevertheless also be read independently of the theme of the film. They show sections of a dry desert landscape painted in extremely reduced colours or abstract areas of colour whose forms make reference to a map. As so often Smith has combined two different visual concepts which together add up to a complex programme but also achieve their effect alone.

Melanie Smith graduated from the University of Reading, England, with a BA in Fine Arts in 1984. Her works are represented in the collections of international institutions all over the world including the MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Tate Modern, London, the British Council, London, the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, the MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City and the Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich. The MACBA, Barcelona is currently showing a large retrospective of the artist entitled *Farsa i Artifici (Fake and Farce)* which can be seen until October 7, 2018. The exhibition will then move on to the Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico and the MUAC Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City. The film *María Elena* is currently also presented at the Liverpool Biennial until October 28. The Venice Biennale 2011 was another important exhibition where Smith's three video installations *Xilitla*, *Aztec Stadium* and *Bulto* were to be seen in the Mexican pavilion. Further solo exhibitions include: *Short Circuit* at Villa Merkel in Esslingen in 2012, *Melanie Smith* at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam (2014) and CAMH Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (2014), *Melanie Smith: Crocodiles and Elevators* at CCA Contemporary Art Center in Vilnius (2014), *Melanie Smith: Fordlandia* at Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes (2014); group shows: *Hello World* at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2018), *Without Restraint* at Kunstmuseum Bern, Berne (2016), *Xilitla* at Tate Modern in London (2012) and many others.

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