

HEAVEN ABOVE - AND BELOW!

Herdis Maria Siegert's Photography as an Art-form and her Relationship to Nature.

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Herdis Maria Siegert has for a long time been amongst the most advanced and trend-setting fine art photographers in our country, Norway. From exhibitions and book-illustrations, we have got used to seeing her selective choice of scenes from nature and always in black and white. She has remained solely in nature in its most elementary and rudimentary form.

It is especially the coastal landscape she is surrounded by where she lives, called 'The End of the World' at Tjøme, which has decided the motives, and has given the motives in her images their basic *Sound*. Therefore, it will hardly seem surprising that she on this occasion, has chosen to reflect and look back upon the past two decade's artistic achievement. She is inviting her audiences to have a wander along the Norwegian coastline, from Tjøme in the south to Lofoten up north (where most photographs are taken), interrupted only by a little side-step to Venice and an esthetical element of some exotic flower-images.

Here are heaven and sea, the glittering sun in the sea's ripples and the shimmer of the sun, on the slopes of naked glimmering granite towards the sea, frozen waves and frothing foam; or it is reeds in water, or raindrops crushing the water-mirror, creating circles widening on the surface. This is nature where Herdis Maria Siegert feels at home. The images testify fastidious choices, and they are almost minimalistic in their expression. Slopes of naked rocks are lying washed and grinded by the inexhaustible sea's swells, the monotony can, however, become broken by a stubborn tuft of grass shooting from a slope in the sterile granite. The slopes of naked rock's massive meditative peace is broken by a single little tassel which is just standing there, inviting intense erotic sensations. It is not only the undersigned's hair standing on end at the sight of these images, which the artist has, for the sake of security, made into two different versions; a light one and a dark one. Erotic associations are just as strongly present in the two versions, both demonstrating nature's own contrasts also regarding erotics.

In other images we see Venetian moorings jutting above the mirror-like surface of the lagoon, resembling potent poles. A gondola's stem cuts into a desolate maritime horizon consisting of sea and fog, creating an impression of a journey into a dimension of eternity. This journey inwards in the images can in other photographs give an impression of a journey into the light; a light however, situated far away in the distance. The flower-images of the orchid, the rose, the lily and the calla bring about the same sensations. A light is situated behind, lightening the flowers from the inside. Especially strong is the effect in the image of the orchid where the whole flower is lighted from behind, so that from the front - in the outer form of the orchid - we can catch a glimpse depicting a monk against a crawfish's claw. This being an expressive symbol of the good versus the bad; a contrast apparently beyond nature itself.

This impression of contradictions' joining in together in nature, which in its elementary presence represents a timeless state of reconciliation, contributes to give Herdis Maria Siegert's images an unexpected religious dimension, which evidently is

intentional. This demonstrates the eternal repetition of things which remain the same, nature's own cyclic course from lightness towards darkness, from temporality towards eternity, from strong agitation towards total stagnation, from purely meditative motives for the images - where nothing happens - towards motives where everything is transformed into metaphors boding renewal.

What is it that the artist attempts are telling us? Or indeed: Does the artist convey nature's attempt to enlighten us ?

Let us return to the starting-point: Herdis Maria Siegert's exhibition consists, therefore, as expressed before, of landscape-images. However - what is a 'landscape'? Moreover, are landscapes synonymous with 'nature'? We are touching upon a serious problem. The problem comes reaches a climax in a time where our qualifications for relating to an immediate and un-touched nature are nearly eliminated. Modern men have made themselves totally dependent on all kinds of contraptions, psychologically (chemicals, pharmacopoeia etc.), and physically (mobile phones, laptops, powerbooks etc.). Additionally modern technology supplies modern men with all sorts of remedies to such an extent that balance between nature and culture has been disturbed. We anticipate today the appearance of a new and unknown kind of man 'The Contraption Man'. This contemporary man, who sustains a lifestyle not because of mere natural abilities, but because the artificial remedies can enable him or her to do so.

We have made ourselves dependant on technology, always in our service, to such an extent, that asking serious questions about what we mean by living a normal life or for that matter, to die a normal death, seems appropriate. One might ask if there is a way back to a natural state for people who in their lives are totally abandoned to the mercy of artificial contraptions to sustain their (accordingly artificial) level of living. What we mean by 'a natural existence' seems to be connected to a life where all the appliances are working for us. In that respect, nature has become a product of culture, not the other way around.

Besides, our time's problems connected to pollution (green-house-effects) make it futile to comment on 'pristine nature' or 'nature's pureness'. These are conceptions with reference to people in bygone times. These questions are exceedingly relevant regarding this exhibition, and touch upon essential reflections whereupon Herdis Maria Siegert herself apparently has founded her images.

From the press and media in general, we are mainly subjected to scenes of polluted and messy beaches, when there is a wish to demonstrate the contamination taking place in our coastal landscapes or - as another aspect - scenes of beaches crowded by hordes of tourists. Herdis Maria Siegert goes in the opposite direction: Her images show coastal landscapes completely devoid of any human element, either pleasurably or pollutingly occupied. The photographs are not manipulated. They show images of coastal landscapes where the artist has, together with 'the third eye of the camera', captured moments of nature unfolding in its pure and raw, elementary and selfsufficient state. All images demonstrate a total absence of human beings. Because of this, however, these peaceful almost silent images 'speak' to us even stronger. The very idea is apparently considered thoroughly by the artist herself. In this exhibition, there rests a complete stillness in all the images present. They are resting in themselves. It is as if we are allowed to join the artist's moments of meetings with a nature which, - in a favoured moment - has disclosed itself, for thereafter to

break off all contact and withdraw into itself. Just because of that, they call upon a way of communicating and an awareness of the importance of such meetings with nature, in its immediate condition, for our own mental health; for our security and our identity.

These factors have apparently contributed towards Herdis Maria Siegert's naming some of her images *Mindscales*, and not *Landscape*s. This expression seems suitable to throw a light upon all the images in this exhibition; images of the moment they might be of a landscape located *out there*, transformed however, through the images onto *mindscales*. These mindscales' origin, are as previously mentioned, metamorphoses of nature seen through the artists' own photographic eye. She therefore calls them *contemplations*; something more than the mere reflection of nature. All of the watermirror-images belong to the series *Reflections*.

This exhibition thus represents an accomplished battle for environmental protection, a battle to shield nature on its own terms, beyond pleasure or usefulness. Thereby this exhibition is also reminding us of how important it is to include the artists in the battle for nature. They can 'observe' aspects which might have become lost by many others.

The artist has chosen the title *Hommage* for her exhibition, and the title corresponds most suitably with her ideas. As well as meaning favour or honour, the additional meaning can be 'to pay tribute to'. It is in the latter meaning that Herdis Maria Siegert's *Hommage* pays tribute to the nature we are about losing access to.

Translated from Norwegian by Hilde Raastad O'Hanlon.