

Martin Summers Fine Art Ltd., London

“TWILIGHT” exhibition - March 29 - April 27, 2007

Exhibition catalogue - Forward by Colin Gleadell

Beatrice Helg's art holds a unique place within the tradition of staged and constructed photography that evolved in the 1980's with such celebrated practitioners as Jeff Wall, Gregory Crewdson, James Casebere and Thomas Demand.

On first glance it might appear that Helg is a sculptor or an installation artist, simply documenting her work on camera. She works with found materials - rusted iron, steel plates or sheets of glass. As sculptural forms, they might bear passing reference to a work by Richard Serra or Eduardo Chillida. They echo with a timeless, archaeological resonance. These solid, elegant forms, which she will sometimes cut or refine to create a balanced composition, float like a Malevich black square in space, or settle like a totem placed in the wilderness.

Space or wilderness, it is a stage on which a metaphysical drama is played out. It's an imaginary world of neglected industrial beauty - rusting iron spotted, flecked, dripping with earth colours - copper, amber, ochre, sulphur, gilt - like an Alchemist's cave.

In the drab dull daylight this would be a murky world indeed. But then up come the lights - bright, white, flashing strobe lights - and the scene erupts with colour, contrast, light and shade. For an instant, an ethereal light bursts through clouds and the apocalyptic vision is snapped, captured for eternity.

The play over, the props are removed, returned. What survives is only the photograph - a moment in time, but of no time. And it gives no clue as to what scale we are operating in. The cave looks massive, but was probably only a few feet high.

Unlike Wall and Crewdson, Helg's world has no people, no recognisable landscape, no discernable narrative; unlike Demand's, no underlying social message. What she seems to be constructing is something extraordinary out of the ordinary; and she has done it with light - a light as sublime as that which shone on Turner's Alps, and equally as mystical.

Colin Gleadell

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