

FABIAN & CLAUDE WALTER GALERIE

Introduction to the Exhibition "Tides of Light" – Gezeiten des Lichts

Photographs by Sonja Maria Schobinger

Similar to ebb and flow, light moves through and inside the works by Sonja Maria Schobinger. Starting from her early self-portraits as a means of self-assurance for a young woman finding her place in the world, to her more recent photographs of sun-drenched treetops and dissolving flower petals.

At the beginning, we find the search of a young woman for her own space within this world. The black-and-white photographs powerfully convey her critical and searching gaze on herself as a young woman, on her personality, and on her first home, both inside and outside in the world. Thereby, it becomes clear that from the very beginning of her artistic journey in the mid-1980s, Sonja Maria Schobinger has been a photographer. In the darkroom, she first explored the possibilities of analogue photography curiously experimenting with silver gelatin prints. Later during her artistic research, she delved into the world of digital photography, only to return again and again to traditional artistic techniques, such as drawing, however, practiced using the possibilities of a computer screen. The camera is a significant technical instrument to tentatively explore the world and herself. Yet, it is not the technical aspect of photography that interests her most (today). Her quest is for substance beyond matter by illuminating fleeting moments with great nuances capturing their transience in her images.

Sonja Maria Schobinger's long-term (research) projects have evolved over decades in thematic groups: early self-portraits in *Coming of Age*, *Anthemis Nobilis*, *Still Lives*, *Flowers* and *Trees*. In the long-term project *Anthemis Nobilis*, we see a female body - the artist's own body - enveloped and protected by plants. For this body of work, Schobinger interwove images of her body with plant photographs taken by Josef Hanel "I. H.", who was born in 1865 in today's Czech Republic. These historic, hand-coloured glass slides were entrusted to her for her artistic research by the brothers Bert and Walter Siegfried. The female body is more sensed than seen since its contours are wrapped in various plants: mistletoe, blackberries, strawberries, violets, and delicate branches from different trees. In her compositions the artist searches for the essence of each plant and its harmonious counterpart. The result is a series of fragile image-layerings that challenge the viewer's eye without distorting the perspective. These various layers create a certain visual tension. At the same time, by combining historic botanical photography with analogue images from *Coming of Age* using digital techniques, the work expresses different layers of time: past and present, the capturing of a moment and the documentation of change over time. The plants, with their unique and specific qualities, provide a protective covering for the vulnerable body offering both protection and healing. At the same time, they embed the human organism into the forces of nature and the cycle of life.

The still life photography in the series *Still Lives* draws on historic models from Flemish painting, while the tree photographs reference Japanese colour woodcuts. Simultaneously, both make contemporary statements through light and colour contrasts as well as unusual vessel shapes. At the same time, the genres of painting, drawing, and photography merge. It seems as though the artist is searching for the essence of being, the formative energies beyond matter. Although, the blooming branches and floral bouquets are arranged in vessels from various cultural contexts, they seem to grow out of and beyond them. Light reflects on the surface of matter, while, at the same time, that same matter dissolves into the transparency of the petals.

In the moment a petal is backlit, or the shimmering canopy of a tree becomes translucent, light - the immaterial - becomes visible. And here we again encounter the photographer behind the lens, who sensitively and precisely illuminates the magic of the moment and explores the mysteries of being.

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