

8 February – 2 March 2019 | DÜSSELDORF

BECK & EGGELING
INTERNATIONAL FINE ART · DÜSSELDORF · VIENNA

Stefan à Wengen
Versions. Die Toteninseln

Opening: 7 February 2019, 7pm
Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art | Düsseldorf

THE EXHIBITION

Knowledge of one's mortality is part of the human condition. But how does one paint the unfathomable, the unknown? One of the most impressive examples of the artistic exploration of death is Arnold Böcklin's famous work »Die Toteninsel« (Isle of the Dead). The gloomy and mysterious romantic painting was so rapidly popular in the fin de siècle that Böcklin painted five versions of this motif between 1880 and 1886, four of which are still preserved today. It was one of the most reproduced works of its time. The extraordinary effect of »Die Toteninsel« influenced both contemporaries and later painters, and led to a stream of new interpretations to this day.

This painting also captivated Stefan à Wengen in such a way that from 2016 to 2017 he repainted all of Arnold Böcklin's »Toteninseln« in his own unmistakable style. And in the impressive format of 180 x 260 cm. Only the destroyed fourth version was recreated in its original format of 81 x 151 cm. Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art is pleased to present all four large-format versions of »Die Toteninsel« in Stefan à Wengen's third solo exhibition. Mysterious images that temporarily transform the gallery's exhibition space into a place of an otherworldly yet thoughtful stillness.

Stefan à Wengen's versions of »Die Toteninsel« are all in the same format and painted in black and white with a light brown tint. Furthermore, they are without the well-known ferryman with a white figure, simply reduced to the rocky island and its nature and architecture. However, these details, which deviate from the famous original, do not in any way affect the unbelievably suggestive effect emanating from Böcklin's original image; the elegance and grandeur, the mystery and enigma of the appearance of the peculiar rocky island that make it so fascinating. In desolate seclusion, a steep rock formation rises up from the sea with a dense group of dark cypress trees in the middle. What hides behind the dark center is concealed from the viewer's gaze.

The rigid nature and the burial chambers hewn into the rock in particular evoke associations of loneliness, melancholy, and death. Themes that à Wengen has addressed in his artistic work ever since, as well as with works from art history and images from the collective memory and autobiographical elements that flow into his painting. In this context, it is only logical that Arnold Böcklin's »Toteninseln« also found their way into his repertoire. The artist, also from Basel and now living in Düsseldorf, became acquainted with his fellow countryman's painting during his childhood, as he used to visit the municipal museums in Basel on Sundays with his father. The young à Wengen first admired Böcklin's original version of »Die Toteninsel« at the Kunstmuseum Basel (located there since 1920). This picture would never again relinquish its hold on the future painter.

However, Stefan à Wengen does not simply copy Böcklin's »Toteninsel« paintings with his new versions. In addition to the reference to his fellow countryman and revered painter, he also simultaneously grapples with his own world of memories and his evolution as a painter. The potency of these morbid atmospheric pictures, with which Arnold Böcklin reached right to the root of an era shaped by melancholy and a longing for death, seems unwavering to this day. They seem to fit well with the reality of the present, given the issues that shape our world today. In this way, Stefan à Wengen's versions also captivate the viewer through their direct effect. One gets lost in one's thoughts in front of the large formats, as if in a dream.

(Miriam Walgate, 2019)

Exhibition

Stefan à Wengen

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Opening: Thursday, 7 February 2019, 7pm (The artist will be present.)

Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art | Bilker Straße 4 – 6 | 40213 Düsseldorf

Opening hours: Tue – Fr: 10am – 1pm & 2 – 6pm | Sat: 11am – 4pm

»Face to Face«

A conversation between the artist Stefan à Wengen and the novelist Frank Schablewski.

Thursday, 21 February, 2019, 7pm

Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art

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