

## Presseinformation

Frankfurt am Main, 12.5.2022

### **The Nature of Nature. Fukushima Project 14. May – 18. September 2022**

Press preview: Thursday, 12. May 2022, 11 am

Opening: Friday, 13. May 2022, 7 pm

At first sight, Norbert Schoerner's photographs seem like studies of individual pine trees standing out against a barren, mountainous landscape of undulating peaks and dark cloud formations. However, closer inspection reveals something unusual. Instead of being rooted in the ground, the trunks of the pine trees end in receptacles reminiscent of the ceramic bowls typically used for growing bonsai trees. The supposed logic of the image – according to which the foreground and background depict a coherent space, a continuous reality – is fractured.

The bonsais in Norbert Schoerner's photographs were cultivated by the Abe family who live in the Azuma Mountains near Fukushima. For three generations, these masters – Kurakichi, his son Kenichi, and his grandson Daiki – have been growing bonsais from seeds. They use seeds from trees only to be found in the shadow of the volcanic Mount Azuma-Kofuji. To create these photographs, Schoerner climbed the mountain and took a series of landscape shots. Placed in front of large-scale prints of these pictures and photographed in the right light, the Abe family's miniature pines look like fully grown trees.

By photographing the bonsais in constructed dioramic surroundings, the artist seems to be returning the plants to their origins so that they can reach their true growth potential. Instead of dominating the tree's powers, their liberation seems to emerge here, which would be in accordance with a Romantic relationship to nature. For this reason, the first room of the exhibition, and thus the starting point of the show, features a photograph of Caspar David Friedrich's *Willow Bush in a Setting Sun* (1832/1835), which Norbert Schoerner photographed at the German Romanticism Museum in Frankfurt. The central concepts of Romanticism, such as subjective perspective and the chiaroscuro phenomenon, are evident in Caspar David Friedrich's works. Subjectivity and individuality, the expression of feelings and the exploration of the depths of the human spirit play a central role in Romanticism. The construction of the pictorial space in terms of perspective offers a view of an imaginative space outside the picture.

Among other things, visitors encounter photographic diptychs and triptychs in the other exhibition rooms, which are reminiscent of Japanese folding screens. This division invites visitors to direct their gaze to the motifs – a view as if looking out from a Japanese building onto a landscape.

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As the viewer's gaze wanders through the exhibition, it becomes impossible to view these works without considering the ecological impact of the catastrophe that occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011. The exhibition offers a direct confrontation with the destructive consequences of this event and with humankind's attempts to use and control nature for its own purposes. One example is Schoerner's short film *Occursion (2020)*, shot on an abandoned farm near Tomioka, Fukushima, about 15 kilometers from the Daiichi nuclear power plant. Here, the photographer used the green glow of a night vision camera to depict the abstract omnipresent radiation that permeates the flora and fauna of the former restricted zone. The images shown are accompanied by a soundtrack by Ferdinand Grätz composed of feedback signals, samples of the ubiquitous Japanese "5pm chime" (daily signal test by the Municipal Disaster Management Radio Communication Network), distorted sound textures, and modified original sounds recorded at the former homestead. The film shows horned cattle feeding on rampant pastures consisting of irradiated cellulose. A pack of dogs stares into the artist's camera. They may have been pets at one point. In the distance, viewers see the lights of Daini (Fukushima II), the sister plant to Daiichi (Fukushima I), which survived March 11 without a nuclear meltdown or explosion.

At the end of the exhibition, visitors encounter two images of an enclosed site stacked with black plastic garbage bags containing irradiated topsoil collected from public land after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accidents. The inconspicuous bags, normally used to dispose of harmless household waste, are evidence of a staggering inability to come to terms with the complexity of the events of March 11, 2011, and their aftermath.

The Japanese idea of the whole being contained in the small is expressed very tangibly in the bonsai. In the small universe of the miniature plant, the much larger actual nature is preserved in its entirety. The potential of real nature is captured here. Accordingly, the bonsai, as a miniature of nature, has the same amount of information as real nature, to which it stands in a relationship of similarity. This is a unique method of controlling the forces of nature without banishing the power of nature or weakening its forces. In the Japanese conception, the bonsai is thus not in opposition to nature.

Norbert Schoerner (\*1966) is a German photographer and filmmaker who has been living in London, his city of choice, since 1989. His professional career started with commissions for the magazine *The Face* in the late 1980s. Besides editorials for major publications such as *Vogue*, *NY Times*, and *iD*, he started to photograph campaigns for brands such as Yoji Yamamoto, Prada, Shiseido, and *Comme des Garçons*. As one of the first photographers

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ever, Schoerner experimented with the possibilities of digital postproduction and the resulting possibilities of depicting alternative realities as early as the 1990s.

His photographs are narratives characterized by a cinematographic quality. In 2014, Schoerner made his debut at the Cannes International Film Festival with his first narrative short film MADE. Norbert Schoerner first traveled to Japan in 1992 and has since visited the country at regular intervals, sometimes for several months at a time. His interest lies in understanding Japanese perceptions of beauty, which can neither be fully described nor comprehended with Western vocabulary.

The publishing house Walther und Franz König have produced the catalog to go alongside the exhibition with contributions by Tom Morton, Shinchi Nakazawa, Julia Psilitelis, and Matthias Wagner K. The catalog can be purchased at the museum box office for 29 euros.

Curator: Prof. Matthias Wagner K

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## Direktor

Prof. Matthias Wagner K

## Ort

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## Öffnungszeiten

Mo geschlossen, Di, Do-Fr 12-18 Uhr, Mi 12-20 Uhr, Sa-So 10-18 Uhr

## Eintritt

12 Euro, ermäßigt 6 Euro  
Kinder und Jugendliche unter 18 Jahren sowie Studierende der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, der Städelschule und der HfG Offenbach frei

## Pressekontakt

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## Pressedownloads

[www.museumangewandtekunst.de](http://www.museumangewandtekunst.de)