

STEFFENSCHÖNI BACK TO BLACK

'Back to Black' is the second approach of steffenschöni to unveil the mystery of the colour white. After 'Further than White' Heidi Schöni and Karl Steffen hit the mark—the pitch black mark! 'Pitch Drop' is a series of new video works in which viscous bitumen flows almost in slow motion across the screen. Its black, glossy, highly aesthetic surface evokes images of lacquer or latex and sensually recalls the unleashed power in Heidi Schöni's new large format paintings. In her series 'Iguazu' she celebrates the beauty of the forces of nature in fascinating blacks which she accentuates with white brushstrokes.

Bitumen was already used in antiquity. The thermoplastic material which is obtained from crude oil liquifies when heated and hardens when cooling down. Due to its hydrophobic characteristics it was specially used for water sensitive building components—the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were supposedly sealed with bitumen. And yet, the material fell into oblivion and was only rediscovered during the Renaissance when it was once again used for sealing roof gardens.

In addition to the video works 'Pitch Drop' which depict the flow properties of bitumen, new works actually made of this material will be on display. Steffenschöni's art practice also includes moulding objects, such as photo cameras, radios, paintbrushes, monitors and even asphalt samples from road construction. For 'Black Logs' they used logs of wood which they moulded with clay and then casted with bitumen. The casting defects that occur are expected and do not lessen at all the aesthetic fascination of these deep black objects. As bitumen and oil, so is coal a fossil material which has undergone a geochemical process of oxygen exclusion and pressure. From this perspective, the casting of wood with bitumen—both fossile energy sources—is like short-circuiting two particles separated by an unimaginable huge period of millions of years.

Without water, no life, but also no bitumen. Heidi Schöni's new paintings from the series 'Iguazu' complete a wide circle of various issues. As diverse the images, objects or videos might seem at first, they combine on many layers parallels which can be interpreted as a metaphor for time and infinity: the slow flowing motion of bitumen (compressed and materialised time) contrasts with the impetuous kinetic energy of the roaring water fall.

When painting 'Iguazu' Heidi Schöni had, on one hand, the eponymous image of Wolfgang Tillmans in her mind. When asked in an interview, how he could free himself from such a stereotype image, he replied that he couldn't and didn't want to escape the fascination of the Iguazu Falls, because there are things that become extremely popular because they are so good. From her Japan travels, on the other hand, Schöni had a notion of waterfall-wood-printings and ink drawings, such as the 'Pine Trees' by Hasegawa Tohaku. Like in the process of moulding wood logs, when new, but distinctive objects of bitumen are created, Schöni re-invents the waterfall in her series 'Iguazu'. On the one hand she appoints the template, but then refers back to herself and to her own art practise.

steffenschöni are Heidi Schöni and Karl Steffen. Heidi Schöni completed her studies at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). She is a freelance artist and lecturer since 1981. Karl Steffen studied at the University of Florida and at the Illinois University. Together they live and work in Schmidshof, Switzerland. Their works have been presented in numerous exhibitions, including the Kunstmuseum Thurgau, Kunstmuseum Singen, Museum Bickel Walenstadt, Werk-schau Thurgau 2016, Hiltibold St. Gallen and Kunsthalle Arbon.

Exhibition

November 17–December 29, 2018

Wed, Thu, Fri 2–6 pm | Sat 11 am–4 pm | and by appointment

Opening reception

Saturday, November 17, 2018 | 3–7 pm

3 pm: Opening of the exhibition

4 pm: Welcome address

5 pm: Exhibition tour

Sunday, November 18, 2018 | 11 am–4 pm