



Galerie Gregor Staiger
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CAROLINE BACHMANN & NICOLAS PARTY

'Tribute to a Lake'
January 30–March 29, 2025

When my daughter looked at the pink-violet-gray gradient of the sky this morning, she said, "The sky is delicious today" – as if it were a moment so unique that one might want to devour it. The light and color spectrum of landscapes is a wondrous object of perception that has also been a subject of painting for centuries. In 1444, Konrad Witz painted "Der wunderbare Fischzug" (The Miraculous Draught of Fish), a biblical scene from the New Testament. The artist transposes the story of fishermen going out to fish in the Sea of Tiberias at the behest of Jesus and returning with a full boat to Lake Geneva. While the meticulously painted protagonists of the story take center stage in the foreground of the panel, the unmistakable panorama of Geneva is visible in the middle ground and a sky pierced by clouds in the background. The depiction of this real landscape becomes a starting point for a possible art history of landscape painting; a history of the longing for a subject that becomes an often kitschy motif, a pleasure and sometimes a vice of art. However, this history of the genre also opens up a conception of landscape that is ultimately only made through an image and its representation that is layered over reality. Very close to Witz's panorama, Marcel Duchamp photographed the unknown waterfall of Le Forestay during a stay in Switzerland in the 1940s, turning his gaze away from the picturesque lake that had been depicted for centuries. The image of the waterfall becomes part of the diorama of his enigmatic work "Étant Donnés" and serves as a reference for Nicolas Party's work "Waterfall" (2024) in this exhibition.

Following in the footsteps of Marcel Duchamp's gaze, Caroline Bachmann finds her artistic perspective on her everyday surroundings and the lake, seen both as a real landscape and repeatedly as an aesthetic event - at first in collaboration with Stefan Banz for the conceptual photo series "What Duchamp Abandoned for the Waterfall." The artist later continues the routine inventory of light and weather in paintings that focus on the view from Cully over Lake Geneva and the opposite Rhône Valley, from which Alpine peaks rise up. Early in the morning, when the day breaks, Caroline Bachmann observes the panorama from the window of her home as part of her daily routine. A landscape that, as Marcel Duchamp wrote in a letter during his visit to Switzerland, is always slipping into a new dress. With a pencil sketch, the artist captures the moment like a musical partition. She notes the light and weather situation with a few keywords. As a continuous basis for her studio practice, sometimes over many months, Caroline Bachmann paints detached, psychedelic landscapes based on these sketches and her memory of the scene's particular mood. The frames painted around these scenes – a reference to the work of the mostly forgotten American painter Louis Michel Eilshemius – illustrate how we look and that we as viewers are always in an ambivalent relationship to what we see. In a peculiar way, these quotes from art history bring the images into the present: a framed way of seeing through the framing of the screen, the black edge of the cell phone, which allows the image and its technology to merge seamlessly; or our view of a landscape through the train, plane or car windows.

On a mauve background, we find these images, whose titles minimally describe just what we see (e.g. "Soleil caché nuage orangé" or "Hidden sun orange cloud") in the company of Nicolas Party's "Landscapes" (2024) – here, too, the titles are a sober description of the content – which have the same panorama of Lake Geneva as their motif. The reflective surface of the lake, the towering mountain massif and a narrow strip of sky form the repetitive composition of the scene, which is bathed in glistening light. Growing up just a few kilometers from Caroline Bachmann's current home, this landscape was the place of Nicolas Party's childhood and his first encounters with painting. The artist finds his own surroundings in the impressionist landscape paintings of François Boccion from Lausanne and, of course, in the works of Ferdinand Hodler and Félix Vallotton, to which the artist often refers. The landscapes that Nicolas Party creates in soft pastel are based on contemporary



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photographs and are oriented towards reality. Elements such as the silhouettes of mountain peaks are individualized in such a way that they are clearly recognizable. They show what we see in photographs, in memory; but they also show how our vision is shaped by (generic) images and a specific history of the painting of this lake through the artist's tried and tested method of sampling by using stylistic set pieces from the history of painting. We recognize not only the panorama, but also images and stylistic elements from art history that have incorporated the same motif.

The works of Caroline Bachmann and Nicolas Party inevitably draw their motifs from the specific (conceptual) history of Swiss landscape painting, beginning with artists who traveled through the Swiss Alps in the 18th and 19th centuries to create Alpine views; tourist images such as those at the beginning of Ferdinand Hodler's oeuvre, through to the symbolist (dream) landscapes of the 20th century. In contrast to a long tradition of landscape painting, their approach to the motif is characterized by the emptying of figuration and any human trace and the associated loss of the human scale and temporality of landscape. What is painted, even if the real landscape is recognizable in the shape of the mountains, no longer corresponds to the actual subject, to what is seen, but reflects an inner image, an idea nourished by memory, history and fiction. Similar to Marcel Duchamp's work, the paintings do not function as images of the real, but as portals - as through Marcel Duchamp's two peepholes, through which the surreal panorama with the waterfall in the background can be seen. Instead of through a wooden door, we look through the frames at the pictures, which are always a sum of pictures. They freeze time - the present is inscribed and captured - while at the same time evading any temporality.

There is a long-standing exchange and common artistic interests between Caroline Bachmann and Nicolas Party. Both have repeatedly experimented with various collaborative forms of artistic production in their artistic practice. For "Tribute to a Lake," they chose not only the same subject but also an identical square image format. The conceptual repetition of the same subject is a tribute to the lake of their childhood, their everyday life and the motif of painting.

Judith Welter, January 2025