

Record Catch

Sotheby's Artist Quarterly, Vienna

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We see tropical opulence, plump fruit, abundant fauna. It's so beautiful, it triggers wanderlust. We follow the call, we step closer... but everything is different now.

In their exhibition Record Catch, Mariella Lehner explores the motifs of a series of postcards that they collected in New York. The hand-colored lithographs from the 1920s show the richness of North American monuments and natural landmarks. Radiant prints of a glowing world of color that immediately evoke feelings of nostalgia. Lehner explores the question of how much nature has changed in the course of just 100 years – and how this realization gives rise to the longing for a time that one did not experience oneself. A view, that reveals the experiences of Lehner's generation in all their honesty, and thus the collective mourning over a world in decay.

In a mixture of painting and drawing, the artist takes up the pictorial contents of these prints and translates them into the language of her medium. Large-format works show dynamic compositions, that are characterized by an interplay between lines and shapes.

Free and self-confident, the motifs on paper and canvas often remain sketchy and unfinished, forcing the eye to constantly jump between foreground and background.

Among these, a work showing a record fish catch in Florida: The death of twenty fish, but *framed* in a better way. So many creatures pile up here, as if the sea itself could not hold them. As we step closer, their bodies turn into gestures. They dissolve and lose themselves, like a swarm that disintegrates into its individual parts. What is it like to swim in the sea these days?

Record Catch is a scene that becomes paradigmatic for Lehner's exhibition. It tells of paradisaical conditions - a world of seemingly endless plentitude.

Reading between these lines, the title reveals it euphemistic qualities to the fullest. For even if tourism, for whom these postcards where ultimately produced, is not solely to blame for the situation, it is at least partly responsible for the disappearance of their motifs. Which desires are sold to us as our own – and make us complicit in this context? The metal butcher's hooks, used to weigh down the canvases pose a similar question. They anchor themselves in space, like they would in flesh and seemingly prevent the landscape from changing. As gleaming fruits of chrome steel, these interventions elude our wondrous gaze – obstacles that are typical of Mariella Lehner.

What color is memory? Shimmering, you could say, but different from reality. Sometimes tinged, pastel-colored, or painted in water-colors. A blurred mystery that we fill with our expectation. Just as ambivalent is how Mariella Lehner applies the paint to their canvas. Sometimes with a brush – roughly, in sweeps – or finely sprayed, with an airbrush. Transparency, nuance, negative space. The bodies are allowed to remain unfinished, full of tension. As lines, they resist their classification in space and reveal their ambiguous legibility behind layers of Japanese paper: the abundance of this world is finite. The rise of capitalism is at the expense of the world beyond – *our world*.

Despite everything, Mariella Lehner's works convey this with a lightness that is free of accusation. Documenting, pointing out, processing. Because nature is resilient and constantly changing. This flow finds its way into their works and runs its course through the entire exhibition. It is not a dystopia or the past that is painted here. It is the present - *in color*.

Text (translated from German): Simon Goritschnik