

Primeval Nature in Experimental Photography

The Swiss photographer Ester Vonplon seeks out and captures nature in supposedly unspoiled places – before it possibly disappears as a result of climate change and human intervention. *Ester Vonplon – Flügelschlag* (Wingbeat, Christoph Merian Verlag) is the first comprehensive presentation of the photographer's artistic praxis and provides insight into three formally independent groups of works. The publication visualises the intensity with which she explores the very essence of nature and reflects on human beings' relationship with it.

The thicket in the primeval forest Scatlè in the Surselva region of Graubünden is captivating in black-and-white precision or else astonishing in an alienating coloration. One way or the other, the images convey the idea that nature here follows its own rules. The works in *Il uaul*, which were made by using an analogue large format camera, were – like the other works introduced in the book, taken in scarcely accessible high alpine valleys, the intactness of which was something that had to be politically fought for decades ago. The photographs allude to the vulnerability of such ecological systems without aspiring to being activist.

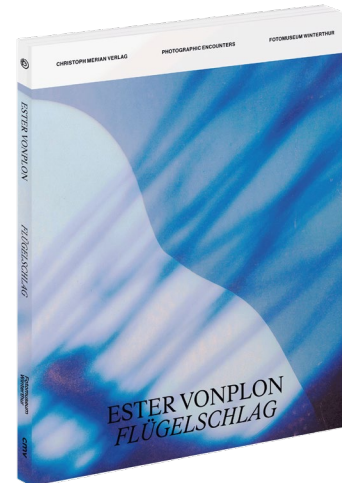
For the work groups entitled *Flügelschlag* and *I See Darkness* Ester Vonplon worked without a camera, exposing instead directly onto photography paper. For *Flügelschlag* she used Cellofix photographic paper dating from 1907: the interplay of the directly exposed old carrier material and the stalks, stones, feathers etc. she placed on it gave rise to an autonomous image quality with lucid colour nuances. Time and chance also play a role in the series *I See Darkness*. Here the artist used an abandoned tunnel as a darkroom in which she laid out photographic paper and exposed it over a long period of time.

All the working processes show nature as it is at the particular moment, without any intention of ordering or controlling the actual situation. In this, Vonplon's approach differs fundamentally from the colonial and military contexts in which photography was used at the time Cellofix was being produced.

But above all, the photographer points to the fragility and unpredictability of nature. Her tender and powerful photographic art fascinates people interested in art, ecology and photo-techniques.

Ester Vonplon – Flügelschlag is the second volume in the *Photographic Encounters* series which is being realised jointly by the Fotomuseum Winterthur and Christoph Merian Verlag.

Exhibition at the Fotomuseum Winterthur: 28 February – 14 June 2026



Fotomuseum Winterthur (Hg.)

Ester Vonplon – Flügelschlag

pp. 232, 138 mainly colour illustrations, softcover with dust jacket, 21 x 26,5 cm, Series: Photographic Encounters, German/Englisch

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CHF 39.– / EUR 39.–
ISBN 978-3-03969-061-9

Printable files of the book cover and other illustrations are to be found in the Media Release relating to this publication under:

merianverlag.ch/presse

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