



Nature's Tapestry

Bernis von zur Muehlen

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Ori Z. Soltes, Curator

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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM PROJECT SPACE

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Introduction

By Bernis von zur Muehlen

Nature's Tapestry presents four series of images: bald cypress knees in mysterious assembly at water's edge; trees undergoing seasonal changes, as viewed from the windows of my home; shadowy scenes evoking landscape as a dream, and, in contrast, Koi fish in playful movements stopped in time.

The bald cypress knees, inhabiting the regions between land and water, create a sense of mystery and magic in landscapes that are miniature in scale but often startlingly cosmic in their effect on the observer.

The trees, viewed again and again in different lights, show the inevitable progress of the seasons, an intimation of mortality and rebirth. In this tapestry of nature, behind the weft of color and form, is an invisible warp of mystery.

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The child looking out across the water suggests nature's promise, while the shadow silhouetted in the foreground intimates mortality, a future seen as "through a glass darkly."

The Koi, symbolizing courage, patience, and transformation, seem to dance in some imagined cloud-scattered sky.

Opposite: #15 *Bald Cypress Knees at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA*, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

Curator's Statement

Ori Z. Soltes

I was first astonished by Bernis von zur Muehlen's photographs 25 years ago when her images led me through the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague. Her sense of mystery and understanding of how to convey mystery visually offered a perfect match for the centuries old space, with its gravestones thrusting up from the earth at odd angles among trees and their roots: a crowded and crepuscular space captured by her lens in an eternal dusk of feathered shadows and hints of light.

I confess to an addiction to her quality of light, in black and white or blazing pigments and to the formal qualities with which, over the years, she has encompassed an ever-widening range of subjects and visual vocabularies—found in nature and found in shapes devised by human mind and hand. This exhibition reflects both her talent as a photographer and her thinking that wraps around her image-making. Bernis and her inestimable husband, Peter—himself a brilliant photographer—conceived its contours.

Four groups of works—like the four directions of our human reality—articulate lush patterns in nature punctuated by three poignant human intrusions. We are reminded how privileged we are to be the beholders into whose eyes all of this captured beauty pours.

Artist Statement

Bernis von zur Muehlen

Themes of transformation, dissolution, and evanescence have pervaded much of my work.

For my early studies of the nude, I often used unfiltered infrared film, allowing the surface of the human form to dissolve in light, dispelling the illusion of physicality. Later, nudes in color dwell more on the aging body and the prospect of mortality.

While living in Kathmandu, Nepal from 1984 to 1985, I used SX-70 Polaroid film to document the transformations through worship of small, street-level Hindu and Buddhist shrines scattered throughout the Valley. Centuries of daily worship by human touch and the smearing of vermilion powder had worn down sacred stones and icons. Because of their detail-flattening unpredictability, the Polaroid recordings yielded a final transformation from the spiritual into art.

In my infrared photographs of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague, taken in the years between 1985 and 1992, the ancient gravestones, crumbling and eroded by the elements and by the passage of time, glow in the sun and merge with spring's foliage or winter's shroud of snow, revealing beauty in mortality. Mortality is also the subject of my images of cremation urns beside portraits of the dead in Prague's Christian columbaria.

A project of the early nineties, entitled *Evanescence: Photographs at the Water's Edge*, was in part inspired by T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, wherein April, "the cruelest month," is also a month of promise, "breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire."

In this current four-part exhibit, the *Bald Cypress Knees* present an otherworldly, vivid tapestry at water's edge but then point, through photographic transformation, to inevitable darkness. In *Forest Tapestry*, the trees, viewed again and again through my windows, reveal their seasonal movement toward darkness, yet always intimating rebirth. Dream and mystery dominate *Through a Glass Darkly*. And finally, in *Koi*, the shimmering fish seem to dance in a reflected sky, a moment before they disappear.



Bernis von zur Muehlen's Tapestries of Magic and Re-Vision

By Ori Z. Soltes

The philosopher Plato, brilliant as he was, and so right about so many things, misunderstood art. When he wrote about art in books 3 and 10 of his *Republic*, he spoke disparagingly of it as merely *imitating* reality. Artists don't, however, imitate the *elementa* of the world at all: they re-vision them. They transform the raw visual data of reality with their minds and eyes and cause viewers to see things that they had not realized had been there all along. Artists are magicians who cause the unseen to appear.

There is something else that Plato failed to see when he looked at art: the vast and deep range of its spiritual possibilities; its potentially intimate relationship with religion—in two ways. One: that through so much of history, art has been a partner with religion in connecting us to that reality beyond our own for which human words inevitably fall short. (The very word, “religion” means to “be bind back/again”—to the source that most humans across history have believed is responsible for our existence). Two: that the artist emulates God on a microcosmic scale by creating.

Bernis von zur Muehlen is a magician and an artist—her instruments, aside from her mind and her eyes, are the cameras that she has taken from one side of the world to the other—who engages the realm of the spiritual and the everyday, creating by re-visioning reality again and again. She has focused her lens on carefully attired dolls and naked humans, gravestones and grave urns, roadside shrines and ecclesiastical edifices, mountains and trees and streams: that which nature (or divinity) has made and that which humans have shaped. She invites us to see people and places with their distinctive features, so many of which we had not noticed before. She has spent

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Opposite: *#51 Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

decades weaving a compelling tapestry that mirrors the world, its threads at once colorful and subsumed into shades of gray, in which manmade and natural features interweave each other.

So the current exhibition of her work offers a carefully shaped arc within the overall trajectory of her interests and her ongoing relationship with parts of our world that suggest worlds beyond our own. She has woven together threads from nature's tapestry into her own—re-visioning what nature has wrought and transforming it before our eyes into what simultaneously *is* and *is not*: water becomes sky and sky becomes water; trees put forth sacred structures; dark becomes light and light becomes dark. The world of the here and now is both effaced and embraced. Space is redistributed and time altogether stops.



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In one group of images, of the “Bald Cypress Knees,” the unusual natural growths that mediate between earth and water also intermediate between male and female. The artist notes the important role of the lingam—phallus—in diverse versions of dharmic spirituality, particularly Shaivism—where the lingam as a symbol of fertility can be a semi-abstract stand-in for the god, Shiva. But as she notes, the lingam is also a representation of *Prakriti*—Nature. The symbol evolves to assume its own gender-antithesis meaning: *Brahmanda*: the cosmic egg. So it ultimately relates to the union of male and female, in an idealized understanding of the universe and our potential to be part of it—which is why it can also signify and embody knowledge, and infinity, and truth.

This meeting of conceptual opposites that encompass not only human gender, but also heaven and earth themselves (in both the sense of divine and human realms *and* of the worlds in which humans function) is underscored by the image of a lingam placed within a yoni (female pubis). This is a small shrine captured close-up by Bernis' lens, which has been visited and marked by color: specifically, the blood-red pigment of birth and death, accompanied by yellow, the color of purity and chastity but also of sensuality—and not incidentally associated in particular with Vishnu, a co-divinity with the divine Shiva.

Indeed, the artist precedes the series with several images, beginning with focus on one part of a tree in which the “knee” is, as it were, embedded in or against the trunk—like the lingam against the body of the Chandeswar Shiva in the accompanying image that she photographed in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1986 [#56]—as the magnificent arboreal mass, seen from toes to thigh, so to speak, doesn’t yield to the man-made slab of highway beyond it. We are invited to imagine the upward expansion beginning at the top of the image, which connects this being to heaven [#55].

One understands how Bernis is thus drawn to these extraordinary outbursts of nature, expanding their explosive root structures just above the surface of the earth. The series proper that follows the scientific discussion of the knees, relates them to the location of the bald cypresses at the marshy meeting of earth and water and the typical placement of the knees themselves: perpendicular to the roots from which they emerge, a series of erect outgrowths that are both extraordinarily lingam-like [#1]—and also, if one shifts the lens of one’s mind as she has shifted her camera, between close-ups and more distant views of groups of them and with an attention to coloristic nuances, they can, she notes, assume the guise of scattered bones in the aftermath of some man-made catastrophe [#22 and #24]. Like Shiva, then, they can simultaneously suggest opposites: not male and female as much as life and death, fertility and destruction.

The swamp itself, as her camera wanders from the shore, offers these same knees piercing its surface, while providing both lily pads and nests for birds and their eggs—and the undulation of a water snake, disturbing the surface—to intertwine the space of flora with that of fauna [#6, #7, and #8]. The world she re-visions is, we are reminded, contrived of four elements: *earth* and *water*, yes, but reflected in the latter, a rich, blue—or rust-red or pale grayish white—cloud-bearing *sky* and the upper edges of vegetation reaching through the *air* [#14 and #19].

The strident hues with which the initial series of images greets the viewer gradually subside into ever more subdued pigments, resolving into virtual black and white, and the magic of her lens causes us to wonder: has she changed filters, or are we observing the mystery of this corner of the universe at small different places or times? [#17 and #25] We cannot forget, as Bernis clearly has not, that liminal moment in art history when Monet evolved his

never-changing, ever-shifting series of images of the Rouen Cathedral: the same shifting light that he pursued with his brush she has captured with her lens.

Moreover, as Monet and his fellow Impressionists pioneered the pattern of reminding the viewer that what he had done was to *paint*, by leaving the evidence of the brushstrokes and even the horsehairs of the brush itself clearly present in the surface of the painting—so Bernis in the last several of this first series deliberately leaves the rounded framing of the image intact, to remind us that the camera has been there. Monet’s muddy strokes push the viewer to step back and *complete* the painting by (unconsciously, perhaps) deciding on the right distance from which to see the blobs of color assume the shape of a cathedral. Bernis’ keyhole-like framing of these images (and several more in the subsequent series in the exhibition) underscores for the viewer that we are sharing in a tight focus on a small series of skeins in the vast tapestry of nature, guided there by her eye and her lens’s eye [#21 - #27].

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That Monet-like sensibility resonates even more directly from her second group of images. The “Forest Tapestry” behind her house, the constancy of which is draped in consistently changing patterns, in accordance with the seasons and the times of day, scintillates not only with shifts of light that transform the tree trunks, but also of other natural appurtenances that adorn its winding thick and thin, bent and straight, curved and cornered vegetation: leaves of varied hues—or no leaves at all, except on the earth—and mist and shadow [#34 - #36]. Monet’s cathedrals’ manmade solidity yields to the inconstant caresses of nature’s (or God’s) eternity; von zur Muehlen’s *forest* wraps *nature* within the shifting instantaneousness of nature. She complements her images with Hermann Hesse’s observations on the issue of art exemplified by nature: how we see—how we all re-vision, however subtly, each time we see the same slice of place—and what trees, in particular, can teach us about ourselves.

Bernis has transported us from the marsh to the forest and from one sort of arboreal ambiance to one completely different—about which we are also reminded, by way of Robert Frost’s poetry—of the voiceless voices of the

trees, the eloquent silences and subtle sounds that her camera eye hears; and of the sweep of seasons marking our brevity in the corridors of nature [#37 - #41]. The transformations in the tapestry that her lens sees invite us not only to look but also to hear the rustling of their leaves—as we may have heard the water lapping against the cypress knees. She has captured permanence and impermanence in the same moment when her shutter clicked [#42 - #44].



#37 *Woods behind the house on foggy morning*, November, 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

Is the image that precedes the next series—“Through a Glass Darkly”—the *last* of the previous series or the *first* of this new one? It encapsulates the point and purpose of art, of *this* art: what could be more emblematic of the temporariness of the human encounter with time and space than the image of a little child looking from earth to water, surrounded by the fragile flowers of spring—than that image also encompassing the shadow of the photographer herself, holding the camera to her eye? We see her seeing the little girl seeing. Aside from the ephemerality of childhood, flowers, and shadows, the sequence of watchers and those being watched might suggest to the viewer that there are others—or an Other—beyond us, seeing *us* see [#53].

Through the inspiration of the biblical text quoted by the photographer we move our way through a series of earth-water images nearly drained of color and dominated by a single tree [#51, #45, and #48]—its trunk, its branches, its leaves, until we arrive at another manmade visual contrast: the strictly regimented vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines of the railing of a footbridge across (and reflected in) the absolutely still water, offering a dialogue with the irregular small figures of people on the bridge and leaning against its railing—this is a wedding party, an intimate moment within the universal celebration of human love—and the riotously chaotic contours of the trees and branches with their lush outbursts of blossoms [#49].



#47 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

The camera follows the idea of that delightfully irregular profusion across a horizon of trees and the sweeping skies above them across which tiny birds sketch the patterns of their flight [#47]—and back to a plump and shapely stump guarding visual access to the water, beyond which more vegetation and more trees lead the eye [#52]—and on to the suggestion of a path along which flowering trees lead around the curving shore of water once again [#46].

Each visual moment reminds us that no visual moment is final or definitive: they are all made permanent by the instrumentation of the camera, but each is momentary, its components part of the constancy of change that the universe offers to those who look and see.

Once again the final image in the series separates itself from all that has preceded and suggests a prelude to the series that follows. “American Dream Way, Reston, Virginia” embeds, on a more dominating scale than that of a footbridge railing, regularized geometries: of a circular colonnade—each column a stylized, branchless tree trunk, the entire group crowned with a perfect circle of rectangles and adorned across its diverse surfaces with webs of shadow against the light—as the culmination of a magical and hopeful pathway among the network of trees [#50].

The trees that have charted their transformation across the universe of Bernis imagery yield to yet another configuration of the human interplay with nature. The water at the edge and surface of which the viewer has hovered throughout the varied photographs up to this moment turns, beneath the surface of the water, to “Koi,” the pigment-varied Amur carp bred, beginning in Japan, since the early 19th century, for ornamental purposes. That is to say: human agency has intervened for 200 years to provide an augmented form of nature’s visual delight.

Whereas the unwavering trees and cypress knees have been re-imagined as constant transformative tapestries that echo changes over *time*, the plumply delicate fish are captured as they move through *space*, angling themselves about in diverse yet identical shapes. Bernis has managed to affect a series of coloristic manipulations some of which transform the reality of photography into the illusion of oil painting [#28]—yet another *re-vision*. Others undermine the certainty with which the viewer sees these creatures as moving beneath the water by the illusion that they are hovering above, in the sky—three of them, golden yellow, nose to tail, the sun’s white heat burning above them, as a fourth, marked by the red and yellow hues that perhaps we recall from the early image of the lingam and yoni, disappearing off the image edge [#29]; or a single large, speckled gold and black one, almost pausing, it seems in a stationary pose, pursued by and in pursuit of tumultuous fragments of cloud and scores of white-dot stars [#31].

What elsewhere was the railing of a footbridge across the water has morphed into the shadow of that railing stretching across the water near the ghostly image of another Koi, in bright pink [#30]. This is—as she points out by referencing T.S. Eliot—“where the dance is.” The dance that follows the music she has composed with the melody of her camera and the harmony of natural and humanly contrived elements, that connect heaven and earth, water, and air.

The imagery returns to the marshy simplicity of pairs of Koi following each other just beneath the surface of the pond, with clouds reflected in the water, or swimming away in their whiteness from the reed-studded water-edge [#32]. One might say that the four series of photographs have returned, with the last image [#33], to where they began with those lingam-knees: vertical natural elements thrusting up from the earth and water toward the sky, combining life and death at borders of the quietly wild places that the artist has sought out and to which she brings us.

“Bernis von zur Muehlen is a magician and an artist—her instruments, aside from her mind and her eyes, are the cameras that she has taken from one side of the world to the other—who engages the realm of the spiritual and the everyday, creating by re-visioning reality again and again.”

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#55 *Tree Trunk, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 42 x 38 in.

A Correspondence in Nature

A lingam (Sanskrit: लिंग) is an abstract or aniconic representation of the Hindu god Shiva. According to Hindu scripture, the lingam is devoid of smell, color, taste, etc., and is spoken of as *Prakriti*, or Nature itself. In the post-Vedic period, the lingam became symbolic of the generative power of Lord Shiva and represents the *Brahmanda* (the cosmic egg), signifying that creation is affected by the union of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, the male and the female powers of Nature. It also signifies *Satya*, *Jnana*, and *Ananta*—Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity.

— Bernis von zur Muehlen

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#56 Chandeswar Shiva, Kathmandu, Nepal, c. 1984. Ilfochrome, 24 x 20 in.



#54 Shiva Lingam on Yoni, Kathmandu Nepal, 1985. Polaroid SX-70, 10 x 8 in.

I. BALD CYPRESS KNEES



“A cypress knee is a distinctive structure forming above the roots of a cypress tree of any of various species of the subfamily Taxodioideae, such as the bald cypress. Their function is unknown, but they are generally seen on trees growing in swamps. Some current hypotheses state that they may help to aerate the tree’s roots, create a barrier to catch sediment and reduce erosion, assist in anchoring the tree in the soft and muddy soil, or any combination thereof.

20 Cypress knees are woody projections sent above the normal water level, roughly vertically from the roots, with a near-right-angle bend taking them vertically upward through water. One early assumption of their function was that they provided oxygen to the roots that grow in the low dissolved oxygen (DO) waters typical of a swamp, acting as pneumatophores: mangroves have similar adaptations. There is little actual evidence for this assertion; in fact, swamp-dwelling specimens whose knees are removed continue to thrive, and laboratory tests demonstrate that the knees are not effective at depleting oxygen in a sealed chamber. Even though there is no expert consensus on their role, the supposition that they are pneumatophores is repeated without comment in several introductory botany textbooks.

Another more likely function is that of structural buttressed support and stabilization. Lowland or swamp-grown cypresses found in flooded or flood-prone areas tend to be buttressed and ‘kneed,’ as opposed to cypresses grown on higher ground, which may grow with very little taper.”

— Wikipedia



#1 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#2 *Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014*. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

Some of these outcroppings, photographed beginning in 2014, remind me of the small, ground-level Hindu and Buddhist shrines—transformed daily by puja (worship offerings)—that I saw during a year of living in Kathmandu, Nepal, in the mid-1980s. Many cypress knees suggest Shiva lingam shrines, while others evoke mother goddess stones, smeared with the vermillion powders of puja.

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— Bernis von zur Muehlen

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#4 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



25

#3 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#5 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



27

#10 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#18 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#9 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#11 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014, Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#6 Bald Cypress Knees With Water Snake, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014.
Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#7 Bald Cypress Knees With Nesting Goose, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014.
Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#8 Bald Cypress Knees With Goose Eggs in Nest, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014.
Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#15 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#19 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#16 *Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA*, c. 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#13 *Bald Cypress Knees and Lily Pads, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014*. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#12 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#17 Bald Cypress Knees at Dusk, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna VA, c. 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

40



#14 Bald Cypress Knees and Lily Pads, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#20 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2017, Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

Toward the end of the decade, I began to see
their forms more darkly, like scattered bones
from an imagined long past battle.

— Bernis von zur Muehlen



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#22 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

44



#24 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



45

#23 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#26 *Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019*. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#21 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#25 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#27 Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2019. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

II. FOREST TAPESTRY



The following images are of the same woodland scene behind my house, all taken from a window in different seasons and at different times of day.

— Bernis von zur Muehlen



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#34 *Woods behind the house*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

52



#35 Woods behind the house on foggy morning, November, 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

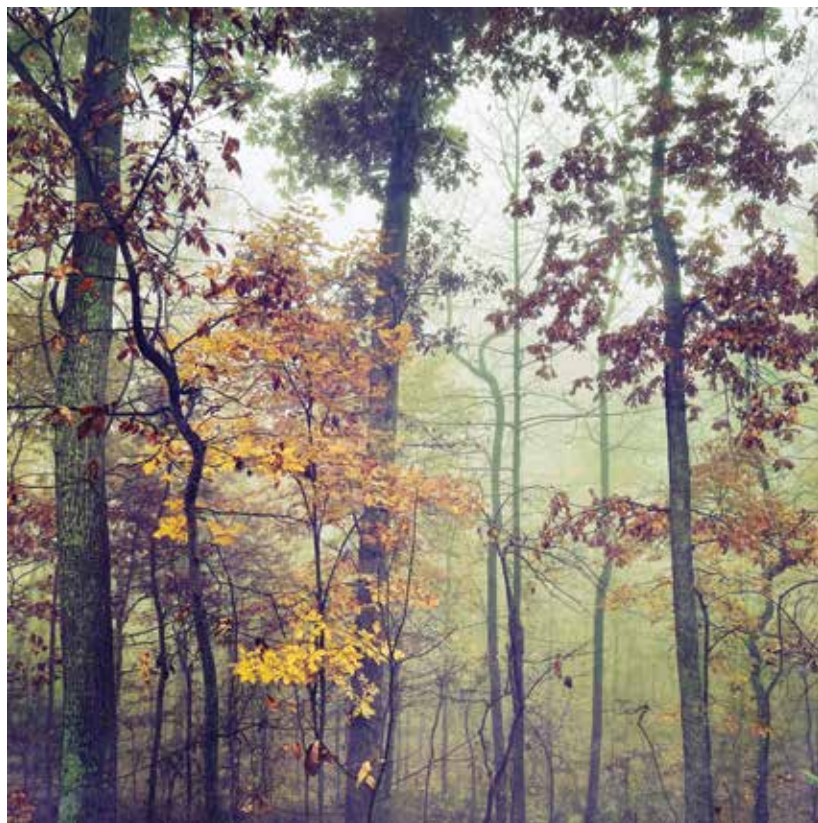


#36 *Woods behind the house on misty morning*, November, 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

“Trees are holy. If you know how to talk to them, how to listen to them, you will learn the truth. They preach not doctrines and rules: they preach, with no concern for details, the primal law of life.”

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— Hermann Hesse
Trees



#37 Woods behind the house on foggy morning, November, 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

56



#38 *Woods behind the house, end of autumn*, December, 2014. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



57

#40 *Woods behind the house*, October, 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

58



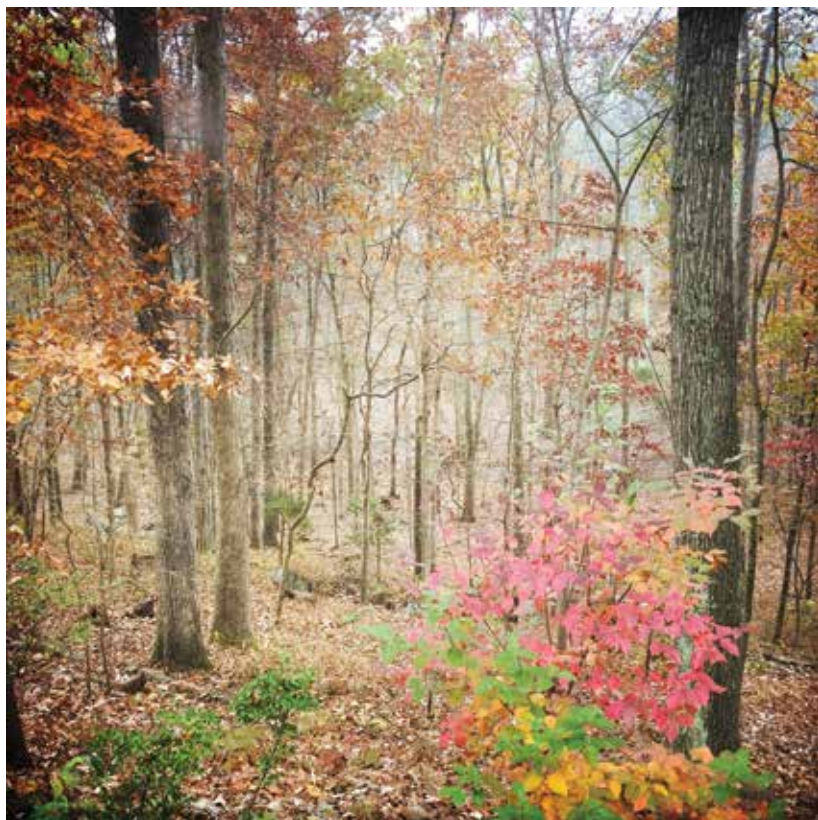
#39 *Woods behind the house*, November, 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

“Trees have long thoughts, long-breathing and restful, just as they have longer lives than ours. They are wiser than we are, as long as we do not listen to them. But when we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy. Whoever has learned how to listen to trees no longer wants to be a tree. (S)he wants to be nothing except what (s)he is. That is home. That is happiness.”

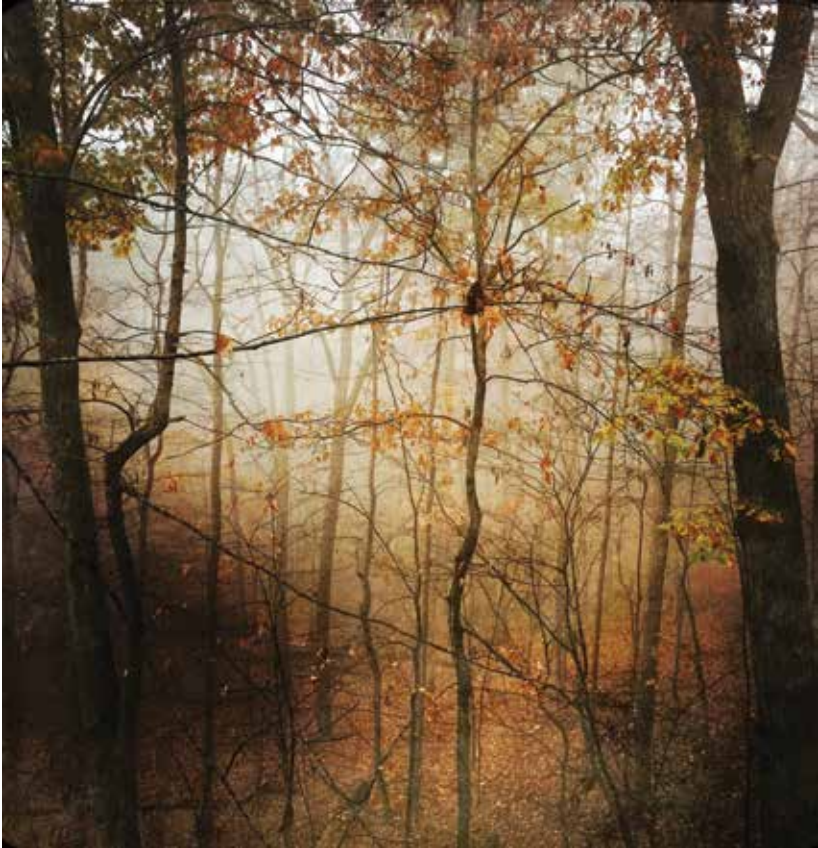
59

— Hermann Hesse
Wandering: Notes and Sketches

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#41 Woods behind the house, October, 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



61

#42 *The darkening woods behind the house*, November, 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#43 *Woods behind the house at dusk*, November, 2015. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#44 Woods behind the house in deepening autumn dusk, c. 2020, Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

The Sound of Trees

I wonder about the trees.
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?
We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace,
And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air.
They are that that talks of going
But never gets away;
And that talks no less for knowing,
As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay.

My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
From the window or the door.
I shall set forth for somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on.
I shall have less to say,
But I shall be gone.

— Robert Frost
Mountain Interval

66



#53 *Little Girl Looking Out Over the Water, Meadowlark Garden*, April, 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 32 x 38 in.

III. THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY



“When I was a child, I thought as a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, but when I grew up I put away childish things; for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

— 1 Corinthian 13:12

68



#45 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



69

#48 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#51 Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#49 *Through a Glass Darkly: The Wedding Party, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#47 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#52 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#46 *Through a Glass Darkly, Meadowlark Gardens*, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



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#50 Through a Glass Darkly, American Dream Way, Reston, VA, c. 2021. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

IV. KOI



Koi is an informal name for the colored variants of the Amur carp, kept for ornamental purposes. The many varieties of ornamental Koi originate from breeding that began in Niigata, Japan, in the early 19th century.

— Bernis von zur Muehlen



#29 Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#28 Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

“At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is.”

— T.S. Eliot

“Burnt Norton,” *The Four Quartets*

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#30 Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#31 Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

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#32 Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.



#33 *Koi at Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA, c. 2022*. Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

“The dance that follows the music she has composed with the melody of her camera and the harmony of natural and humanly contrived elements, that connect heaven and earth, water, and air.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

In the beginning of her career, **BERNIS VON ZUR MUEHLEN** photographed people, focusing on portraiture and the nude, especially the male nude. Exhibits of that work took place in venues like the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Baltimore Museum, the Delaware Art Museum, and the Frankfurter Kunstverein, as well as commercial galleries in Washington DC, New York, and elsewhere. This work is also featured in a dozen well-received anthologies on the subject.

In the eighties and later, she broadened her interest to include other subjects. In Nepal, she documented landscape, culture, and religious shrines, culminating in the 1990 Terra Sancta exhibit, curated by Frances Frailin, at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC. In Prague, a city still in the grip of communism, she photographed the Old Jewish Cemetery, producing images that formed the Sacred Silences exhibit, curated by Ori Z Soltes, at the B'nai B'rith National Museum in 1992.

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Her studies of cremation urns in Prague's Christian cemeteries, set in decorated dioramas behind glass, became the subject of an exhibition in 1991, entitled *Four Photographers: Linda Connor, Rosamund Purcell, Claire Flanders, and Bernis von zur Muehlen*, at Troyer Lassman Gallery in Washington DC. The late John Sarkowski chose a piece for the *1992 Triennial Exhibition* at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Closer to home, Ms. von zur Muehlen photographed the evanescent beauty that lies between water and land. This work was the basis for the 2001 Troyer Gallery exhibit *Evanescence: Photographs at the Water's Edge*.

For the 1998 Troyer Gallery exhibit, *Narratives of Desire*, she photographed dolls her students had saved from their childhood as "little divas" exuding paradoxical sensuality.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernis_von_zur_Muehlen

<https://www.bernisvonzurmuehlen.com>

ABOUT THE CURATOR

ORI Z SOLTES teaches at Georgetown University across a range of disciplines, from art history and theology to philosophy and political history. He is the former Director and Curator of the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum and has curated more than 90 exhibitions there and in other venues across the country and overseas. He is also the author of over 280 books, articles, exhibition catalogues, and essays on diverse topics. Among his books are *Fixing the World: Jewish American Painters in the Twentieth Century*; *The Ashen Rainbow: Essays on the Arts and the Holocaust*; *Our Sacred Signs: How Jewish, Christian and Muslim Art Draw from the Same Source*; *Tradition and Transformation: Three Millennia of Jewish Art and Architecture*; and *Between Pasts and Future: A Conceptual History of Israeli Art*.

<https://orisoltes.com>

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Front cover: #25 *Bald Cypress Knees, Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna, VA*, c. 2019.
Chromogenic Silver Halide on Kodak Premium Endura, 14 x 14 in.

The AU Museum Project Space, launched in Summer 2019, is dedicated to working with academics and non-traditional curators to create exhibitions addressing special topics of interest across the university and the greater Washington community.

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