

## NEW YORK



Lisa Oppenheim, *Miroir entouré d'oiseaux*, 1943/2022, ten-part suite of collaged gelatin silver prints, each 35 × 24 7/8".

## Lisa Oppenheim

TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY

Lisa Oppenheim's show "*Spolia*" extended her investigations into the reproduction and occlusions of cultural memory, this time by diving into the documentation of art that was looted by the Nazis from Jewish citizens in occupied territories during World War II—and that then went missing. Though the exhibition's title—Latin for "spoils of war"—conjures thoughts of carnage and cultural plunder, many of the show's works were based on anodyne photographs of stolen still-life paintings. As in her past works, Oppenheim complicated her appropriations, altering her source materials by way of fragmentation, serialization, and darkroom play. Through such transformations, Oppenheim infused her haunting images with a kind of violence that reflects the horrific means by which the original works of art were pillaged and ultimately lost.

She began researching looted art via the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) Project database, a multi-institutional archival initiative named after Hitler's task force responsible for seizing cultural property. The Nazis' thorough record keeping made it possible to trace the origins of the stolen possessions, though not always to restitute them. Some of the still lifes Oppenheim found had been stored at the Jeu de Paume in Paris during World War II. Rather than make gelatin silver prints from the high-resolution images of the works she discovered, she reproduced them via analog processes that feel downright alchemical. To create the solarized suite *Miroir entouré d'oiseaux*, 1943/2022 (all works 2022), she used firelight to print details of the titular seventeenth-century Flemish painting on top of black-and-white photographs she commissioned of the sky above 38 avenue Henri Martin, where Adolphe Schloss lived with his family, and where the painting first hung. Collaging past and present, Oppenheim's pictures mimic the dimensions of the missing paintings. She installed nine of these images in a row, but left some empty space before a tenth one of clouds, her gesture evoking the gaps left in all archives.

Her artworks also pique one's curiosity regarding her research about her subjects' histories, which adds gravity to their otherwise serene imagery. For example, the ERR Project database reveals chilling details about the Schloss collection, to which *Miroir entouré d'oiseaux* once belonged. A portion of this collection was seized in Paris and taken to the Führerbau in Munich. When at the end of April in 1945, in the days before Hitler's suicide and Germany's surrender to the American army, the building was ransacked by hungry, desperate local citizens, the genteel still life was presumably snatched again.

In the gallery's second-floor space, the artist moved beyond the still-life genre. Four of the works here featured missing avant-garde landscapes documented by the Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) archive at the Free University of Berlin. Appropriated in 1937 from institutional collections, these paintings had been labeled "degenerate" by the Nazis and toured in exhibitions around Germany. A fourth piece imagined what other cultural objects might have vanished from history. *Stola*, a captivating photogram that Oppenheim made from a vintage lace geometric-print scarf that she found at a Parisian flea market, was a memorial of sorts for a scarf the artist read about in the ERR database. Hanging here, this image stood as a material metaphor for the shadowy nature of memory and for the particular limbo of objects that possibly now exist only as pictures.

The 35-mm slide-projection *Kakadu* most explicitly collapsed the distinctions between original and reproduction—this time, via sculpture. For this work, the artist collaborated with the archivists at the Meissen factory in Germany to locate the mold of a porcelain cockatoo figurine she'd learned about from the ERR records. Two projectors cycled through photos of the Meissen archive and of details of the mold, from its square base to its delicate feathers. These beautiful images of Oppenheim's were also, paradoxically, mere impressions: of a negative space that simultaneously holds the potential for creation and appears as a container for loss.

— Wendy Vogel

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