

L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht presents:

Peter Bialobrzeski

„Paradise Now“

April 30 to June 26, 2010

You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening on Friday, April 30, from 7.p.m.

Paradise Now features fragments of nature—some staged, others untouched and unaffected by urban growth—located on the periphery of the artificially lit infrastructure of Asian metropolises. Unlike daylight, the lights of the big city do not go in any particular direction. Artificial suns made of sodium lamps, automobile headlights, and illuminated skyscrapers form a kind of "vernacular light" that causes this urban "super greenery" to oscillate between hyperrealistic and surrealistic. The photographs celebrate the lush growth as a sign of hope, yet provoke the question of whether we can still responsibly account for this kind of illumination given the prognosticated climate catastrophe. Never before have our cities been so bright, never before have people been able to look at urban greenery in this way. It is the rapid growth of cities that has allowed this kind of illumination for this brief period in the early twenty-first century. If we become sensible of our responsibility, then we will have to resort to technologies that put a halt to the waste—and these pictures will become historical. The photographs will remind us that decadence and stupidity almost always look quite pretty. I shot the photographs on the book jacket and on page seven in 2005 and 2006; they are the starting point for the exploration presented in this book. The rest of the photos were taken between October 2007 and March 2008 in Hanoi, Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. To preempt all

speculation: the works were outlined digitally, then shot with conventional large-format technology and interpreted using the expanded possibilities offered by the electronic darkroom - always in view of the results here intended. They are not based in compositions, but instead refer to an idea of the world rather than to a reality that can be replicated. This fragmented, subjective, and explicitly photographic view does not, therefore, assert that this is the way it was. Still, I think it is just possible that it might have been this way.

Peter Bialobrzeski

As far as we know, the Garden of Eden has been empty of humans ever since Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and were therefore severely punished: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." That is what God said at the time, and then he sent them both out into a hostile natural world. It is understandable that he tried to get rid of the human beings. Still, it is strange that he did not regard the damage that would consequentially be done to the thorns, thistles, and the herb of the field, and that he condemned all of Earth's ground simply for the misdeeds of two people. Humans, however, did not for one minute consider starving by the sweat of their brows. They invented machines and built cities, and then they noticed: none of this made nature theirs.



L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht
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As of last year, more than half of all people now live in cities. Whether we should immediately call this the urban millennium, as Kofi Annan has done, remains to be seen. After all, we have no idea if we will still be here at this end of this millennium—something that also has to do with our cities, among other things. Cities take up only three percent of the earth's surface, but they are responsible for seventy-eight percent of carbon emissions. If we want to save energy, we have to turn out the lights of the cities, says the author of the Stern Report, Nicholas Stern, who has investigated the economic consequences of global warming. The dense urban development of a few megacities and their huge surfaces of black tar make these cities five to ten degrees warmer than surrounding areas, and this can also be seen as a sign that cities, as the motors of economic growth, are now running at dangerously hot temperatures. In the city, nature has been suppressed: shoved aside, flattened, and sealed off by construction machines, in a rigorously literal sense. It has been outsourced—moved to the outside—and at the same time, it is used as if it were a service that can be taken for granted, which can be brought home at any time, in any amount, depending on one's needs. Cities have always survived at the cost of others—from the surrounding countryside, which as the grain supplier already in ancient Rome stretched all the way to Egypt. Today, a city like London, with its frenetic rate of consumption, needs three hundred times the resources that its own fields can produce. By 2030, almost five billion people will live in cities, which will then require around 2.5 billion more acres of farmland—a surface about the size of Brazil. A surface that does not exist. Which is why all of the prognoses cited seem more than questionable, since they assume that there will be linear—that is, relatively peaceful—development around the world.

The rash urbanization of our day affects mostly Africa and Asia in particular: demographers at the UNO predict that, by 2010, most of the megacities will be in Asia. Already, Asia has three times as many cities as

there are in the western world. In all of these cities, there is hardly any interest in quality, sustainable construction, or in developing historical identity. Metropolises such as Singapore and Jakarta regard themselves instead as continuously circulating pumps. New business districts are constantly popping up, and the moment they are created, everyone knows that they will be tom down again in twenty years. "To live in Seoul primarily means to forget, and to become accustomed to forgetting," writes Korean author Kim Young-ha. "If there were a doctor who provided therapy for cities, his diagnosis for my hometown would be the following: 'short-term amnesia: Like an Alzheimer's patient, the city suffers from an illness that causes it to lose its most recent memories. And it continuously alters its image, like a fanatic graphic designer correcting photos in a digital lab'"

Paradise Lost Peter Rühle



All photos from the series *Paradise Now*, © Peter Bialobrzeski

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