

SPECTACULAR LIGHTSHOW WITH FIREFLIES

Katrien Vermeire has put upon herself a difficult task: to capture the mesmerising image of a swathe of fireflies. Her series of pictures, a celebration of saturated colours, keeps the magic intact.

FROM OUR EDITOR

GEERT VAN DER SPEETEN

LEUVEN (Belgium) – Although she often depicts rather abstract subjects, the pictures of Katrien Vermeire (31) are recognizable and have a genuine unaffectedness and natural feel. It wasn't by chance that this photographer was one of the guests in "disturbed Silence", a project around silence, art and psychiatry in Duffel, Belgium. The particular ominous intensity of silence saturates much of her work.

For her current project, she travelled to the National Park 'Great Smoky Mountains', Tennessee, USA. She was beguiled by the natural phenomenon. There, she followed swarms of fireflies for weeks, which, during the month of June only, perform their nightly spectacle. This involves a miraculous group dance of pulsing, glowing synchronic flashing lights, with a pause of some seconds between each pulse.

According to Vermeire she feels a deep connection with those scientists who count insects with an almost possessed fervour. "We share the same focus, the same monomania, the same way of looking."

Her night pictures took on the shape of an experiment. They also posed a technical challenge for her. Vermeire used three different cameras for the shoot, and instead of being able to choose the ultimate moment herself, she was doomed to work with long exposure.

The result is not an article in the style of National Geographic. Vermeire doesn't dryly name her poetic series of photographs "Fire Flies", but "Godspeed" (old English for "good luck" - Eds.) She conjures the effect of a lightshow: an overwhelming tapestry of sparks and streaks of light; a surrealistic presence, against a background of blue trees and undergrowth in the saturated colours of the night.

Vermeire has placed the central image in the light box, a prominent position in Museum M in Leuven. It is the most abstract picture of the series. In this position it is illuminated with more diffusion than a halo on a Baroque painting.

The solo exhibition in Leuven is not a retrospective, but an overview of Vermeire's recent work.

The series of sea views from all over the world are particularly special. In each picture the horizon is dead central. The series has the unassuming and down-to-earth title *On Selecting Vibrations*, as if Vermeire only wanted to capture a silent rippling. The surface of the sea seems to be in a constant state of flux, altering every second. The essence of Vermeire's photography lies in the stark austerity of her images and the lacking of any superfluous furnishing which could distract the viewer.

Katrien Vermeire, "Godspeed". Exhibiting until February 13 in Museum M in Leuven, open every day except on Mondays from 10:00 – 18:00

www.mleuven.be

Geert Van der Speeten in De Standaard, Tuesday, January 11, 2011