

Lot 6



Auction Modern, Post War & Contemporary, Evening Sale

Date 27.11.2024, ca. 18:04

Preview 22.11.2024 - 10:00:00 bis
25.11.2024 - 18:00:00

BEARD, PETER
1938 New York - 2020 Montauk

Title: Camera Work Portfolio, 1960-1987.

Subtitle: 10-part.

Date: Later prints from 1998.

Technique: Gelatin silver print.

Depiction Size: 49 x 33,5cm.

Sheet Size: 50 x 40,5cm.

Notation: Signed, dated, titled and many inscribed with detailed notes in ink on recto or in the margin. Additionally verso with copyright stamp.

Number: 5/10.

Frame: Each framed.

Provenance:

- Camera Work Gallery, Berlin
- Private collection North-Rhine-Westphalia

- Peter Beard led an artist's life between extremes: glamour and danger
- The fight for species conservation became the photographer's personal concern
- Beard sensitively described and labelled his prints as more than documentations of the outside world: as testimonies to his turbulent inner life

A life between endangered species and supermodels

The American photographer Peter Beard made his first trip to Africa at the age of 17, accompanied by the great-grandson of Charles Darwin. After studying art history under Josef Albers at Yale University and working for a time as a fashion photographer for Vogue magazine, Beard turned to the African continent and thus to his life's work after his fateful encounter with Tania Blixen in 1961. He established his permanent residence in Kenya with the construction of his farm, Hog Ranch, near the capital, Nairobi, and in the neighbourhood of Blixen's coffee plantation. Since then, he has dedicated his work to the unsparing documentation of the destruction of the natural animal world and to species protection.

Beard, who led an eccentric lifestyle, had already become known for his haunting portraits of prominent representatives of the art world and New York society, to which he himself belonged. As a colourful character who was friends with protagonists such as Truman Capote, Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol, he never completely turned his back to superficial society. Beard was considered a restless vagabond, just as untamable as the wild creatures he photographed. Artist and bon vivant, he led a double life that revolved around women and predators. In Kenya, Beard experienced a time when independence from Great Britain was taking place, the black market in ivory and rhinoceros horn was increasing uncontrollably, and droughts were depleting resources. His unsparing exposure of these injustices is documented in his photographs of the dying of elephants and other wild animals in Kenya's Tsavo National Park, which were published in 1965 in the shocking book 'The End of the Game'. The documentary filmmaker and activist with a pronounced penchant for adventure did not shy away from risk or danger in order to capture the tortured nature and its creatures up close.

Impressions full of beauty and pain

The diaries that Peter Beard has kept throughout his life have a special place in his work. They are both an artistic project and a private passion. The pages are exuberant and chaotic, filled with things and finds that reflect daily life or a particular mood. In addition to the photographs, there are spontaneous pen drawings, handwritten lines and splashes of colour, as well as small bones, product labels, newspaper headlines, telephone numbers and even traces of blood. Just as Beard's documentary photographs and notes provide insights into the wounded soul of Africa, so the spontaneous collages with notes and sketches reveal the inner world of the artist.

The Camera Work portfolio contains a collection of such edited photographic prints, some of them from 'The End of the Game', supplemented with texts. This is where the contrast that is inherent in Beard's images is particularly impressive, and at the same time reveals the conflict of their creator between beauty and pain. On the one hand, his highly aesthetic photographs can be seen as an ecstatic celebration of the African soul, even as something glamorous. On the other hand, they must be understood as an indictment, even a desperate outcry in the face of the downfall of a continent fighting a hopeless battle against the exploitation of industrialisation. Ultimately, the gripping power of Beard's images does not stem from a sober documentary function, but from their overwhelming expressiveness as personal documents. They testify to the fact that Beard has devoted himself body and soul to the fight for the preservation of the harmonious coexistence of humans and animals.

Bettina Haiss

Estimate: 70.000 € - 100.000 €



