

The Picturesque and the Sublime in Lee Friedlander's Landscape Photography

Guest lecturer: PD Dr. Lars Nowak

Abstract: The lecture will discuss the landscape photographs taken by the American photographer Lee Friedlander since the 1970s, in particular those showing the western parts of the United States. Friedlander, whom Martha Rosler has described as “an exemplary modern photographer,” became primarily known for his innovative cityscapes, which achieved a high degree of formal complexity through the techniques of saturation, overlapping, fragmentation, and superimposition. After the 1960s, Friedlander transferred this approach from urban to rural spaces, where, due to different circumstances, he enriched it with additional means and effects. The lecture will relate his aesthetic to two essential concepts of European art criticism and philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries, the picturesque and the sublime, with a particular focus on Immanuel Kant's distinction between a mathematical and a dynamic sublime, as Friedlander's landscape photographs connect the idea of the maximum with its opposite in view of the complete appropriation and ecological endangerment of the American West. In order to contextualize Friedlander's landscape pictures, the lecture will compare them with the rest of his diverse oeuvre as well as with other American landscape photographers of the 19th and 20th centuries, including Richard Misrach, Eliot Porter, Ansel Adams, Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Watkins, and Timothy O'Sullivan.

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