

HELENE SCHMITZ  
Kudzu project  
photo  
7. 11 - 7. 12. 2013

OPENING : Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup> from 6pm to 9 pm  
LATE NIGHT: Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup> from 7pm to 9 pm

ARTIST TALK - Helene Schmitz & Gabriel Bauret :  
Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 pm at Institut Suédois - 11 rue Payenne 75003 Paris  
Please, register [www.institutsuedois.fr](http://www.institutsuedois.fr)

Nature is not sentimental. It evolves according to its own agenda: to move forward or backward, to dominate or be dominated, to survive or perish... Despite this reality, humanity has always attributed its own qualities, such as kindness or cruelty. And art reflects that. In the Kudzu project, the eye of the Swedish photographer Helene Schmitz observes and records the phenomena of nature with a heightened consciousness of the ephemeral. *To hold on to through photography* is her main motivation.

#### THE KUDZU

Originating from Japan, the *Kudzu (Pueraria lobata)* was introduced to the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for its decorative virtues as a floor-covering plant; it was then massively planted from the 1930s onwards to fix the eroded floors in the South - in Alabama, in Georgia and in the Mississippi.

Very fast and very strong, these leaves of three large leaflets mounted on thin stems spread: in the right environment, the Kudzu can grow up to 30 cm in a day! Thus, within twenty years, this imported plant deemed pretty and useful at first became a harmful plant, « the wine that devoured the South ». The Kudzu spreads, covers, surrounds with its tendrils, smothers almost everything it meets that is inanimate - trees, bushes, flowers, roads, houses - transforming the landscape into a giant Kudzu plantation, horrifying and fascinating. Which *land art* artist would have dared to conceive a project of such scale? The plants form a uniform cover, creating the illusion of an ensemble, a big ocean fixed in its movements and made of a single matter: an abstract, infinite sculpture.

#### THE PROJECT

In a totally apocalyptic manner, the voracious plant takes possession of man's space, dominates it beyond control. This is what fascinated Helene Schmitz. She had already explored **the struggle between man and nature** in her last project **Sunken Gardens (Jardins engloutis)** set in the Surinam jungle (Galerie Maria Lund, 2010 and Festival de Chaumont sur Loire, 2011). For the Kudzu project, she went to Georgia and Alabama several times in 2012, where she created a series of images taken under quite difficult circumstances: the summer weather in the Kudzu kingdom reaches 45 degrees whereas the camera shots demand several hours. Helene Schmitz made the choice to go back to argentic film to get large-framed negatives (24 x 30 cm), in her desire to work with the slowness of a painter, in the mindset that time spent to make a particularly dense matter exist is a necessary time, it's *the time of the advent of the image*. If the photographed object is the Kudzu, Helene Schmitz's interest for this phenomenon is not so much to document it than to place us in front of the power of nature, and this in a plastic form that has its own reasons.

She translates this in the ink jet prints on mat paper (*digigraphies*) made for the most part in black and white, but in a black that possesses such nuances, that it puts forward the impenetrable and abstract dimension of the subject. Thus, one can only see organic forms that detach themselves from the environment, "monumental sculptures" covered in Kudzu. Some images let appear buildings - houses, factories - still recognizable, partially enveloped by the plant. One can foresee their destiny that will lead them to disappear under omnipotent vegetation and one wonders what these landscapes are hiding. What bodies, what constructions, what stories has nature taken hold of?

Through a subtle language and a wise combination of the analogical and the digital, Helene Schmitz brings life to images, which immediate beauty grabs the spectator to better confront him with a nature that is beyond our grasp.

#### BACKGROUND

Helene Schmitz was born in 1960 in Sweden; she is currently living and working in Stockholm. Having graduated in art history and cinema, she taught photography and then devoted herself to her own creations in the 1990s. Since then, she regularly exhibits her work, mostly in Scandinavia, where the institution has shown a growing interest for her work: *Fotografiska*, Stockholm (2011), *Kristinehamns Konstmuseum* (2012), *Abecita konstmuseum*, Borås (2013) and in 2015 *Dunkers Kulturhus* (Cultural Center in Helsingborg, Sweden) will show a monographic exhibition of her work. In 2012, she was commissioned a series of photographs that will be exhibited in the Stockholm metro at the station Mariatorget during the year 2013.

In France, her photographs have already been featured in many exhibitions: *Livingrooms* at the Centre Culturel Suédois in the context of the *Mois de la Photo* (1996), an open-air exhibition in 2007 at the Jardin des Plantes, *Blow Up* at the Palais Rameau in Lille for *Transphotographiques* (2010), *Jardins engloutis* and *Carnivores* at the Galerie Maria Lund for the *Mois de la Photo OFF* in 2010, and then at the Centre d'Art et de Nature du Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire during the summer 2011. Most recently, Helene Schmitz has been selected as a finalist of le Prix de la Photo Camera Clara 2013 (Paris), with the *Kudzu Project*.

Her work has also been shown in the United States, in South America and in Japan.

Part of her activity is dedicated to the publication of books: *A passion for Systems (System och passion - Linné och drömmen om Naturens Ordning, 2007)* was rewarded in Sweden by the Royal Library and the Publishing Prize. Her last book *Ur Regnskogens Skugga (Le projet Rolander, 2011)* was also awarded by the Publishing Prize of Sweden. She has twice been nominated for Swedens most prestigious literary prize, the Augustprize.

For further information and visuals please contact: Maria Lund, Marion Bahy-Baril or Margaux Brugvin  
GALERIE MARIA LUND 48 rue de Turenne 75003 Paris Tuesday - Saturday 12-7pm tel. (+33) 01 42 76 00 33  
mobile (+33) 06 61 15 99 91 fax (+33) 01 42 76 00 10 e-mail [galerie@marialund.com](mailto:galerie@marialund.com) [www.marialund.com](http://www.marialund.com)