

CHLOE SELLS

The Form that Strength has Left

9 November - 23 December, 2017

Artist's reception and book signing on Thursday 9 November, 18:30 - 20:30pm

NextLevel is pleased to present ***The Form that Strength has Left***, a solo exhibition by American born artist **Chloe Sells**.

This is Sells's first exhibition with the gallery, coinciding with the release of *FLAMINGO*, the second monographic publication dedicated to her work. The works in both the exhibition and the publication have been photographed in a part of Botswana that Sells has repeatedly visited over the last three years.

"There is a place on earth that looks like white paint has spilled from the heavens and splashed across its surface. There is no arboreal green. There is no azure water. There is no earthy, brown soil. This albino birthmark is the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans in the heart of the Kalahari Desert of Botswana."

The horizon line, which scores the center of each photograph is symbolic of what is fixed and determined in life—being born and dying. However, as with human existence, its intransigent confidence dissolves once considered. If one were to chase the horizon they would, at last, reach the place they had begun. Therefore the line is no line at all, but rather part of a circle. The meditative approach created by addressing the landscape again and again allows the viewer to consider experience on many different levels.

Chloe divides her time between her home in Maun, Botswana, where she photographs with a large format camera, and London, England, where she hand processes and prints her work in a darkroom. Each of her artworks is the result of in-depth manipulation and spontaneous experimentation with light during the printing process. Beyond her darkroom interventions, Sells has drawn or painted on some works. Through her mark making she describes the underlying affinity and resonance she feels in the place. The pieces are undeniably painterly and immediate, pushing the boundaries of process within the photographic medium. This new corpus of works reaffirms Chloe Sells's attachment to territory, in this case the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, and chronicles a new and deep tale in images at once poetic and contemplative.

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Chloe Sells (b. Aspen, Colorado, USA in 1976) attended the Rhode Island School of Design, from which she graduated in 2000 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography. She received her Masters in Fine Art from Central St. Martins in September 2011. Over the last theirteenthn years she has lived and photographed on three continents, Asia, North America and Africa, and this travel has been integral to her artwork.

The Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana, are vast white blemishes on the surface of the earth. They are birthmarks of time. I drove out of the Okavango, into the hot, white desert landscape, watching for the palm trees that line the unfaithful rivers and mark the beginning of the Makgadikgadi. There would be something or nothing when I arrived. Eventually, in the distance, a shoreline presented itself. The sky was full of circling birds and the breeze was swollen with their calls. There were hundreds of flamingo, flotillas of thousands of pelicans, African spoon bills, marabou storks, egrets, stints, all coexisting in a paradise, hampered only from expanding infinitely by the line of the horizon.

I first came for the flamingos, but I returned for something else. My husband was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer, which he eventually died of, only after leaving me pregnant with our daughter. Set against the backdrop of these circumstances, Sua Pan offered beauty, solace and respite and I returned again and again. The beautiful and the sacred live side by side and our feelings for the one are constantly spilling over into the territory claimed by the other. Each time I visited I was offered a different variation of the place, which I examined through days of making pictures. In that space I was in synchronicity with the difficult story within my personal life and creativity and was able to confront the finite while witnessing the infinite.

In its geographic essence the land furnished me with necessary contradictions. The waters that fill the salt pans are seasonal, and some seasons they come not at all. These waters are caustic and shallow. The pan when full is nothing like a sea, despite how it may look it can dry up in a matter of days. During part or all of the year salty cracks and stray feathers trace the relic shorelines. There are Kalahari lions somewhere in the distance – or perhaps close to hand, golden in the golden grass. The beauty can melt you into complacency and the earth can spit you back out. In this environment survival is only for the fittest. The birds come and they go.

The pictures in *The Form That Strength Has Left* are the story—after all. The horizon line, which scores the center of each photograph is symbolic of what is fixed and determined in life—being born and dying. However, as with human existence, its intransigent confidence dissolves once considered. If one were to chase the horizon they would, at last, reach the place they had begun. Therefore the line is no line at all, but rather part of a circle.

The meditative approach created by addressing the landscape again and again allowed me to explore the story more deeply through alchemic. The printing process was both considered and spontaneous producing a kaleidoscopic change with each telling. Some of the images are further drawn on after the printing process is complete. While experience is happening on many different levels simultaneously, there is play between the immutable and the supple in each picture. Each outcome is unique.

Chloe Sells, October 2017