

GHOSTS OF GRANITE

by Stefan Fischer

With a great deal of patience, photographer Michael Lange has caught moments in the French Alps in which the invisible becomes visible.

The heaviest and the lightest come together in the mountains. Here the massive, seemingly immovable rock, piled thousands of meters high, chapped and mighty, sometimes covered by additional snow loads weighing tons. And there, wisps of clouds, driven together by the wind and immediately blown apart again, without place and without support. Sometimes opaque, then again like a veil that still allows a glimpse of what lies beyond. Or, similarly weightless: white flakes tumbling lightly through the air. Even the Alpine crows, blacker than the dark rock Michael Lange explores with his camera, seem as if they had no weight and could not withstand the forces of the wind.

Lange's photographs from the French Alps, which he shows in his photo book "Cold Mountain," are extraordinary. Because they explore the border region between the just visible and the invisible. Because they capture the moment when the first structures emerge from the darkness of the night or from the thicket of clouds - or, conversely, when a curtain is drawn and a last fleeting glimpse is possible of what will be completely hidden a second later. Because the images, that too, are created at the moment when the many gradations of gray open up to the entire color spectrum. It is that moment when only more can be guessed than can actually already be seen, that the trees and meadows are green, that a rock face reveals its delicate red tones, or that the violet light of dawn makes the stone shimmer.

The mountain formations rarely have a beginning or an end in Lange's photographs. Sometimes you see a peak, but then the mountains usually dissolve toward the valley. Or the view upwards becomes more and more diffuse, and a peak can only be imagined in the inner eye as the logical continuation of the lines that are still perceptible. Michael Lange often focuses on a flank or a wall anyway, thus choosing a section instead of the entire mountain or even a massif. Some of the images are so pale that the structure of the light gray tones is not readily recognizable as a mountain landscape. There are some images that even evoke an association with the legendary woodcut "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" by the Japanese artist Hokusai. The thought may also come to mind because Michael Lange relates his photographs to Far Eastern poetry. The book contains no preface, no explanations of how the pictures came into being. Only one of Lange's poems, also titled "Cold Mountain": "Learning to be in the dark, in pain. To trust - to sing. To fly ..." Lange invites us to a kind of meditation, helped along by the few lines of text by the four Zen monks Hanshan, Ikkyu, Basho, as well as Ryokan from the 7th to 18th centuries - snippets of thought that waft through the book like the wisps of mist through the photographs.

"Cold Mountain" unfolds a great power, however, even if you don't like the esoteric much. The images are extremely rich in detail, you discover that the longer you look at them. They have, and this is a quality, no center, everything in them is equally important - and explicitly not: equally unimportant. The photographs withstand a long lingering, a rummaging of the gaze. And thus unfold their sublimity.

from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* April 23, 2021