Appetite for the Magnificent is a photographic and essayistic exploration of the history and present-day world of the aquarium. David and Tania Willen focus their lenses on the pictorial, aesthetic dimension of present-day aquariums in Swiss zoos and Switzerland’s high-end aquarium scene: public and private labs in which “aquascapers” design animal-vegetable-mineral gardens of aqueous delights. These moving-picture aquascapes float between the poles of reality and virtuality, presence and absence, the animate and inanimate world. The fish swimming around in the tank may be present as living, breathing creatures, and yet we also perceive them through the glass as images of fish. In the Willens’ photographs, all shot from the front, the fish seem suspended in mid-air, an effect that brings to the fore the virtual side of the aquarium: it is nothing short of a precursor to the television set.

In his essay on the co-founder and popularizer of aquaristics Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888), Jörg Scheller retraces the evolution of the aquarium at the interface between art, science and religion. Gosse was an artistic illustrator, a self-taught scientist and a devout evangelical, whose life and thought are reflected in the underlying principles of the aquarium: the aestheticization and artification of nature, the systematic observation and exploration of marine life, and belief, according to the Book of Genesis, in man’s God-given “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”. (Jörg Scheller, 2017)
Press Release

Tania Willen, David Willen, Jörg Scheller

*Appetite for the Magnificent*

N° 248
Design: Prill, Vieceli, Cremers
Softcover
128 pages
23 images
18 × 27 cm
ISBN 978-3-906803-48-7 (english Version)
EUR 43 / CHF 43

For further information on picture usage or if you wish to receive a review copy, please contact: Gloria Wismer, Edition Patrick Frey.

T +41 (0)44 381 51 02 E wismer@editionpatrickfrey.ch