

PRESS RELEASE

YANN GROSS: GREETINGS

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WILDE | BASEL

Yann Gross invites audiences to embark on a journey through the intricate tapestry of nature, culture, and identity in his latest exhibition, "Greetings." This thought-provoking showcase uses the palm tree—once a beacon of prosperity and exoticism—as a prism through which to examine the paradoxes of our globalized world. Gross unveils how these iconic plants mirror humanity, reflecting environmental challenges, biodiversity loss, and the shifting sands of society.

"Greetings" unfolds across three distinct chapters, each named after a species of palm tree and located in different sections of the gallery. The "Fortune" series, on the ground floor, delves into the invasive spread of the "Tessinerpalme" in the lush forests of Ticino. These Chinese palms, originally introduced by English botanist Robert Fortune and popularized in the 1960s to create an exotic ambiance around Lake Maggiore, have escaped from cultivated gardens and swiftly transformed the local landscape into a simulacrum of tropical jungles, leaving an indelible mark on native biodiversity. Gross employs multi-spectral exposures, a technique borrowed from agriculture and forestry, to accentuate the palms' incongruous presence and reveal their spectral signatures—making the invisible visible. The immersive display is crowned by two artificial palm trees suspended upside down from the ceiling, a striking visual metaphor for the inversion of natural order wrought by human hands and the ecological impact of globalization.

The "Washington" series on the first floor shifts focus to Los Angeles, where palm trees—once iconic symbols of the Californian dream—now stand as silent witnesses to a fading era. These trees, originally imported by Spanish missionaries for their religious significance and later mass-planted to shape the city's idyllic image, are now in decline due to aging and environmental pressures, including water scarcity and rising temperatures. As their century-long lifespans come to an end, they will not be replanted, given their minimal shade and their contribution to pollution under extreme heat. When temperatures rise, palms release volatile organic compounds, which, when combined with hydrocarbon residues, produce aerosol pollution. Gross collected these hydrocarbon residues from the streets of LA and integrated them into his developing process. The series culminates in a haunting image of a lone palm in the desert, engulfed in the aftermath of a fire—a powerful symbol of California's wildfires and the broader climate crisis, further highlighting the tree's demise. A black-and-white wallpaper of the first San Fernando Mission palms contrasts sharply with photographs taken in Elysian Park, a historic public space in downtown Los Angeles. These images of the park's palm trees subtly evoke the religious significance of the Hollywood cross and the original missionary intentions. The series explores how cultural symbols evolve over time, shaped by biological, climatic, and sociological forces.

This decline of iconic palm trees in Los Angeles is mirrored in another poignant chapter of the exhibition—the “Phoenix” series. This series explores the tension between physical spaces and their virtual representations, centered on the story of a famous palm tree on Lanzarote that became an Instagram sensation after an influencer popularized it. The resulting influx of tourists eager to recreate the viral image led to overcrowding, environmental degradation, and tensions with local residents, culminating in the tree's eventual removal—rumored to be the act of a frustrated neighbor. This narrative is conveyed through minimalist yet impactful photographs rendered in pale, ghostly tones that evoke a sense of absence and loss, emphasizing the stark contrast between the tree's former online presence and its physical disappearance. The photos are only visible when viewed with a camera flash, raising questions about the mediated visibility and the role of technology in shaping our perceptions. Additionally, two light boxes in the room display layered images of the tree as it appeared on social media, with the tree remaining constant while the people climbing it shift positions, highlighting the chaotic interaction of individuals vying for attention.

Throughout "Greetings," Yann Gross skillfully uses a range of photographic and artistic techniques, drawing on collective symbols and cultural imaginations to prompt viewers to reconsider the landscapes they inhabit and the images that shape their worldview. This exhibition goes beyond traditional art, offering a journey that explores the complex relationship between the palm tree, human aspirations, environmental shifts, and cultural narratives. Gross's work challenges us to critically examine the stories we tell about nature and culture, deepening our understanding of the forces shaping our global landscape and our place within it.