

SEPTEMBER

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We-Sa 11-18 and by appointment

ELMAR VESTNER – *BITTER*
Press Release

October 9 – November 13, 2010
Opening: Friday, October 8, 7pm

We are pleased to present the first solo exhibition of the Berlin artist Elmar Vestner at SEPTEMBER. His installation *BITTER* is inspired by an investigation of Walt Whitman's epic poem *Leaves of Grass*. Vestner transfers Whitman's literary means, consisting of ideas bundled into clusters on "loose sheets," repetition, and amalgamations of pictures and motifs, into a spatial installation combining painting and photography. He picks up on leitmotifs from Whitman's cycle such as evanescence, memory, lack of fulfillment, sobriety, and a fusion of emotional states with symbols from nature. In his texts, Whitman repeatedly refers to emotional impressions as "perfumes," "fragrances," "fluids," "scents" or "smoke," and describes the discrepancy between the inner and outer world as a "veil" or "fog." Analogous to Whitman's ambivalent cosmos, which is at once organic-sexualized and transcendent, Vestner develops an alchemical approach in *BITTER*.

The overpainted, showered, scratched or milled surfaces of his photographic works recall chemical reactions that dissolve picture surfaces. In some cases, however, the interventions lay over the motifs like a veil. The title *BITTER* can be associated with the property of certain plants to develop bitter substances when they die. Vestner's installation also deals with a process of decay that releases new energies and connections. The photographic plant and garden motifs, which Vestner reworks in some cases with very aggressive interventions using a grinding machine, fire, or a milling machine, are juxtaposed with abstract paintings. Vestner does not only use acrylic and paint. He employs nitro thinner to remove plant motifs from magazine and book pages and rubs the paint directly onto the canvas in a gestural style – as a kind of essence of the original motif.

In Vestner's art, human contact and alienation are analogous to different work processes. He approaches the motif by removing and applying paint, and by scratching and dissolving picture surfaces. Like Whitman, Vestner sexualizes nature in *BITTER*, drawing analogies between organic structures and human relationships, or "soiling" the romanticized view of landscape with liquids and spots. At the same time, Vestner's portraits and landscape paintings, overflowing with color and destroyed, convey a feeling of transcendence and vision. Light fluxes decompose people and vegetation, suggesting movement, dissolution, and ecstatic fusion.