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J O H A N S A N D B E R G
— V A L L E D ' A O S T A
(L — B . 0 0 7) A N D B E R G

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Decontextualised almost to the point of abstraction the brushwood in Johan Sandberg's latest photo book provides the viewer with few geographical clues as to where the images were shot. The only pointer available is the title, which suggests that we are in Valle D'Aosta, an Alpine valley in the northwestern corner of Italy.

Shadowed by some of the tallest, most mythical mountains in Europe – Mont Blanc, Gran Paradiso, Monte Rosa and the pyramidal Matterhorn – Valle D'Aosta is the smallest, least populous region of Italy and consequently one of the country's most isolated ones. Even though it has its fair share of yearly tourists the way most people experience it is as a series of cinematically shifting views from a train.

This is how Sandberg first encountered the seemingly dead forest presented in the »Valle D'Aosta« photo series. Traveling back and forth between his homebase Milan and Paris to see the girl he just had met there a few years ago he started to notice the eerie beauty of the forest, especially in the winter before the trees blossomed. For a long time the image of the forest lingered in his memory until he one day in February 2013 decided to make a stop and capture it with his camera.

The visual token of that stop is what meets the viewer's eye in »Valle D'Aosta«. Like a silent answer to a question long since forgotten, the images have a pictorial, if not precisely

picturesque, quality to them. Monochromic with vague hues of green, they could be seen as examples of a new kind of nature photography that brings forth mythologies and triggers the viewer's associations to forests perhaps encountered in children's books.

Sandberg's choice of distance between lens and object as well the consistently (some would perhaps say obsessively) narrow framing lends these images their abstract quality. This is not a pure document of a typical Alpine forest but a highly subjective, photographically rendered and chopped-up forest. Fed by all the other imagined or remembered forests that exist in Sandberg's own mind, the brushwood in »Valle D'Aosta« deepens, rather than explains, the enigma of nature.



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