



EVI KELLER

APRIL 2022 - FEBRUARY 2023
MATIÈRE-LUMIÈRE
 DOMAINE DE CHAUMONT-SUR-LOIRE

FROM JANUARY 17, 2023 TO JUNE 22, 2023
SCENOGRAPHY OF DIDO & AENEAS OPERA
 by Purcell, in collaboration with the choreographer Blanca Li and Les Arts Florissants conducted by William Christie

PERFORMANCE DATES

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|---------------------------|---------------------|
| MADRID | January 17-22, 2023 |
| THÉÂTRE DE COMPIÈGNE | February 9, 2023 |
| OPÉRA ROYAL DE VERSAILLES | March 17-19, 2023 |
| LICEU BARCELONA | June 17-22, 2023 |

Evi Keller's artwork situates itself at the crossroads of the matter of which we are made, the light in which ancient civilizations placed the supreme intelligible principle, the very sun of the living... unifying finite and infinite, visible and invisible, nocturnal matter and theophanic fire (...)

For her, art is no longer game, provocation or performance; it re-engages with an ancient practice, the transmutation of elements. Art that is deeply committed to the arcane part of creation, as Henri Focillon wrote, "develops its own physical laws and its own mineralogy... First of all, art is both artisan and alchemist. It works in a leather apron, like a smith. Its hands are black and torn in the struggle of contending with things that weigh and burn." Evi Keller's works can be considered paintings, photographs, sculptures and videos, but they do not belong to any known genre. Saturnian and solar, they are above matter transfigured by light, the lead transformed into gold (...)

Olivier Schefer, Exhibition Evi Keller, *Stèles*, 2021, Galerie Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris



Evi Keller in front of one of the *Matière-Lumière* veils created for the Opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell, Madrid, 2023



Evi Keller, Scenography Creation *Matière-Lumière* Opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell, in collaboration with William Christie and Blanca Li, Madrid, 2023

**Scenography of Dido & Aeneas Opera by Purcell,
in collaboration with the choreographer Blanca Li and Les Arts Florissants conducted by William Christie
Madrid, Compiègne, Versailles, Barcelona**

In the set I designed for Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate's opera *Dido & Aeneas*, I wanted to go beyond the creation of a set by immersing the opera house in a total work of art merging place, music, song and dance. This scenography is inhabited by creations that I call *Matière-Lumière* and which embody the cosmic principle of the transformation of matter by light. It unfolds in the form of three monumental veils, one of which is a translucent triptych, and three sculpture-costumes for the main performers.

Light is, in my opinion, the most beautiful form of expression of love, and the primary source of the meeting of the two souls Dido and Aeneas. Their story is transcribed by a "Performance", interpreted by the light that carries their personal experiences to a universal scale. The organic vibration of a fossilised light, which has become a living skin that breathes and envelops them draws an intimate relationship between the spectators and the love story of Dido and Aeneas on a physical, psychological and spiritual scale. Through its dynamic and evolving writing in the subtle material of the work of art, the light connects us to the spirits of the two souls. It guides them, animates them and, through Dido's death, sublimates their love into a universal and eternal love.

The score played by the reflection, refraction, absorption and transmission of Light on the *Matière-Lumière* works, allows an infinite number of possible views depending on the work and the position of the spectator. The *Matière-Lumière* veils as well as the sculpture-costumes, are in perpetual evolution, going from the mineral, vegetable, animal, human kingdom to the divine. Appearing and disappearing in the light, they create a bewitching link, offering an almost carnal relationship with the bodies of the lovers and the song. It is not the light that is projected on stage but the light that emanates from the works and beings.

The sculpture-costumes merge the singers who inhabit them with all the scenic elements. The light transforms these sculptures, in particular the one worn by Renato Dolcini who plays Aeneas but also, draped in darkness, the Great Witch. The immobility of the singers dressed in the costume sculptures gives them an hieratic attitude that contributes to giving a timeless meaning to the opera's message.

The triptych of translucent veils, material dissolved and etched by light, embodies distant, organic and living worlds. Like spirits, which become incarnate, its celestial fire amplifies the cosmic force of the song.

The first work, a monolith of embers and ashes, is premonition: it evokes Dido's death in the absolute blackness of a petrified light. In the second veil, it is transformed into a luminous landscape of a sensitive world in the making. The spirits of nature are pulsating here, their celestial fire sublime and amplifying the cosmic force, the eternal magic of music and dance.

The large reflective surface of the black water that covers the floor is the matrix of the initiatory journey... a mirror portrait, face to face with oneself... the black water links us with heaven and earth, brings us closer to unity. The reflections of the veil in the depth of the water, the melting of the crystals of the soul and the immersion in the infinity of the universe resonate with Dido's death, crossing the mirror. Like a guardian of the threshold who alone knows the secret, the black monolith bears witness to the imprint of their passage, of the whole story.

Technical information:

In the process of creating the work *Matière-Lumière* the principle of the four elements, fire, water, earth, air, is omnipresent. I combine, among other things, pigments, ink, ash and varnish on thin layers of transparent film which I superimpose, draw, paint, engrave, scratch, erase, burn and expose to the sun's rays, the rain, the wind and cover with earth, in a cycle of many months of continuous work.



Evi Keller, *Matière-Lumière ML-V-22-0207, 2022*, Creation presented during the Art Season 2022, Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, France

BIOGRAPHY

The work of the German visual artist Evi Keller questions the cosmic principle of the transformation of matter by light. The imprints of the moment [sculptures, paintings, photographs, videos, sounds and performances] reveal a process of substantialisation, which is gradually embodied and transfigured in installations that the artist designates as transitional spaces.

This journey through these spaces has guided the artist towards *Matière-Lumière* creations, a unique title that the artist gives to all of her creations of the last 20 years, testifying to the anthropocene. Consisting of carbon born in the stars, the essential nucleus of all living matter and recycled by man, these works are animated and transmuted by absorption, transmission and reflection into changing materials in the interaction with the spectator. Through an alchemical process Evi Keller thus transforms the memory of hundreds of millions of years into pieces of art.

The artist unveils, for the first time, *Matière-Lumière* during the Paris Nuit Blanche 2014. From the beginning of 2015, the Gallery has offered a collaboration to the artist, with a first large-scale solo exhibition from May to September 2015, a presentation of her works in exhibitions in France and abroad, and at fairs such as the FIAC, Art Dubai, Art Brussels. The same year, the Maison Européenne de la Photographie presented the photographs and the audiovisual work *Matière-Lumière [Towards the light-silent transformations]*, which then became part of the institution's video art collection. A conference was devoted to the intersecting views on the works of Joseph Mallord, William Turner and Evi Keller on the occasion of the *Les Lumières de la Vie* series organized by the University of Paris Diderot. On the occasion of the closing ceremony of the Year of Light at the Hôtel de Ville de Paris in February 2015, the artist was invited to project an audiovisual work at the end of Hubert Reeves' conference *Giving People Back the Sky*.

The following year, an installation *Matière-Lumière* is presented at the *Centrale for contemporary art* in Brussels (exhibition *Connected*, March-August 2016). As part of the exhibition of his works at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (exhibition *Le Contemporain Dessiné* from March to June 2016), the conference *La matière au delà du visible* is given around Jean Dubuffet

and Evi Keller. In 2017, philosopher and curator Joke Hermesen chose key works by Evi Keller for the exhibition *Kairos Castle* at Gaasbeek Castle in Belgium (April-June 2017), alongside Nicolas de Staël, Georgia Russell, Anri Sala, Hans Op de Beeck, Pipilotti Rist, Chiharu Shiota, Otobong Nkanga, Antony Gormley and Susumu Shingu. The artist also participates in the exhibition *Passion de l'Art - Galerie Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, depuis 1925* at the Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence (June-September 2017), alongside Paul Klee, Vassily Kandinsky, Alberto Giacometti, Max Ernst, Nicolas de Staël, Mark Tobey and Jean Dubuffet.

Over the past few years, the artist has also regularly collaborated with contemporary dancers and musicians.

In 2018, Evi Keller chose to devote herself entirely to the creation of a monumental installation, the *Performance/Matière/Lumière* (presented for *Nuit Blanche* at Église Saint-Eustache). In an initiation ritual in the tribal sense, the artist welcomes the spectator at the heart of the intimate and personal experience of the multiple visions of transmutation of matter through light. Performers [light, spectator, artist] interact in a transitional space to live in an instant through a few billion years

From March to July 2021, the Jeanne Bucher Jaeger gallery devoted a new solo exhibition to her, *Stèles*.

From 21 May 2022 to February 28, 2023, Evi Keller is part of the exhibition *L'arbre dans l'art contemporain*, curated by Paul Ardenne in Pont-en-Royans.

From April 2022 to February 2023, *Saison d'Art 2022*, the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, Centre d'Arts et de Nature (Artistic Director: Chantal Colleu-Dumond) exhibited one of her major video works as well as a new monumental creation *Matière-Lumière*.

From March 24 to April 17, 2022, the artist is invited to the Teatros del Canal, Madrid, as part of the *Festival Canal Connect*, (Artistic direction Blanca Li and Charles Carcopino) where she will present a performance and installation *Matière-Lumière*.

From January 2023, Evi Keller has been invited to create the scenography for the Opera *Dido and Enée*, by Purcell, in collaboration with the choreographer Blanca Li and Les Arts Florissants, directed by William Christie. Performances from January 17 to 22, 2023 at the Teatros del Canal, Madrid, February 9, 2023 at the Théâtre Impérial - Opéra de Compiègne, March 17 to 19, 2023 at the Opéra Royal de Versailles and June 17 to 22, 2023 at the Liceu Barcelona.



Evi Keller, Scenography Creation *Matière-Lumière* Opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell, in collaboration with William Christie and Blanca Li, Madrid, 2023

Evi Keller

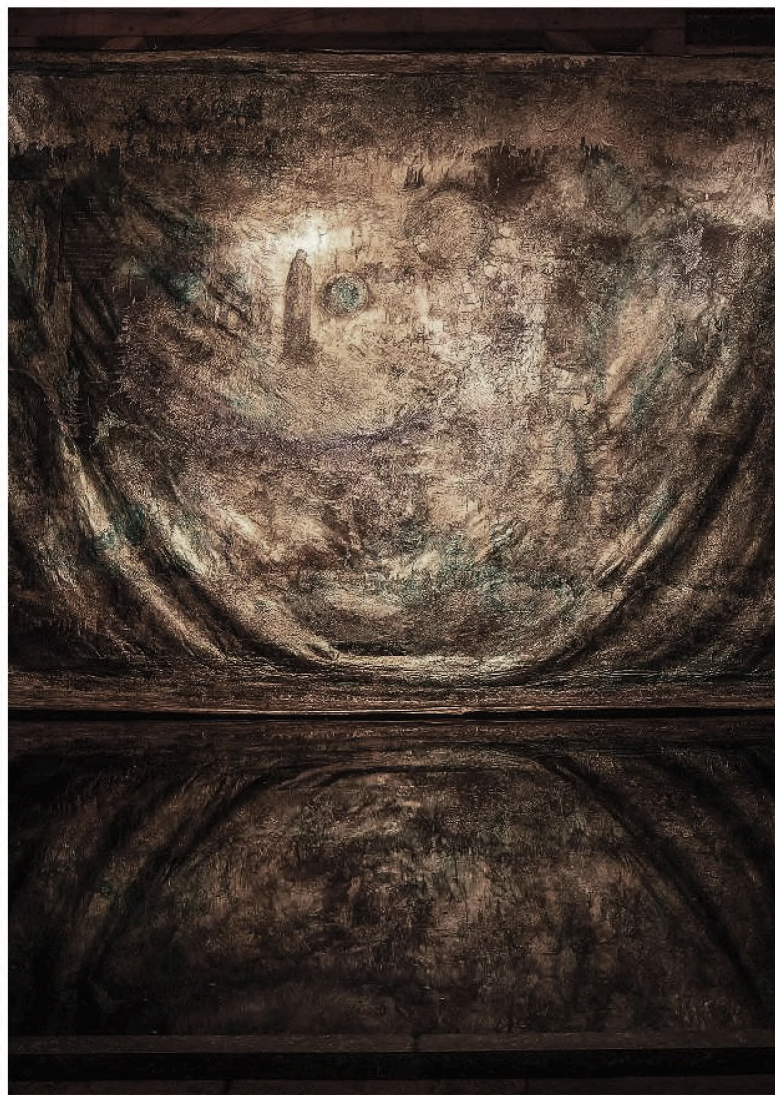
the black sun of melancholy

Materializing light and spiritualizing matter: such is Evi Keller's credo, through a video of dark beauty and an installation in the Bee Barn.

By Myriam Boutoulle

In the presence of the dark beauty of the audiovisual work *Matière-Lumière* [Towards the Light-Silent Transformations], the astrophysicist Hubert Reeves was overcome, saying, "I hope it will be like this when I leave this planet." Convinced that we are made up of "stardust," German artist Evi Keller created this large, hypnotic video in 2015 of reflections in a pool of water, in which the viewer has the feeling of entering a landscape painting one layer after another, until a star appears and then fades away. A specialist in Romantic aesthetics, Olivier Schefer described this succession of hypnotic images as "landscapes burned by night." A work of and about the world whose components are gradually revealed, *Matière-Lumière* confronts us with the origin of creation in the most radical sense of the term, when there was nothing but fusions, flows, concretions of matter, and luminous flashes. Presented in the stables of the Domain of Chaumont-sur-Loire, this video forms the matrix of a set of works (photographs, sculptures, videos, performances) titled *Matière-Lumière* in which the artist, who was born in 1968, seeks to "materialize light and spiritualize matter."

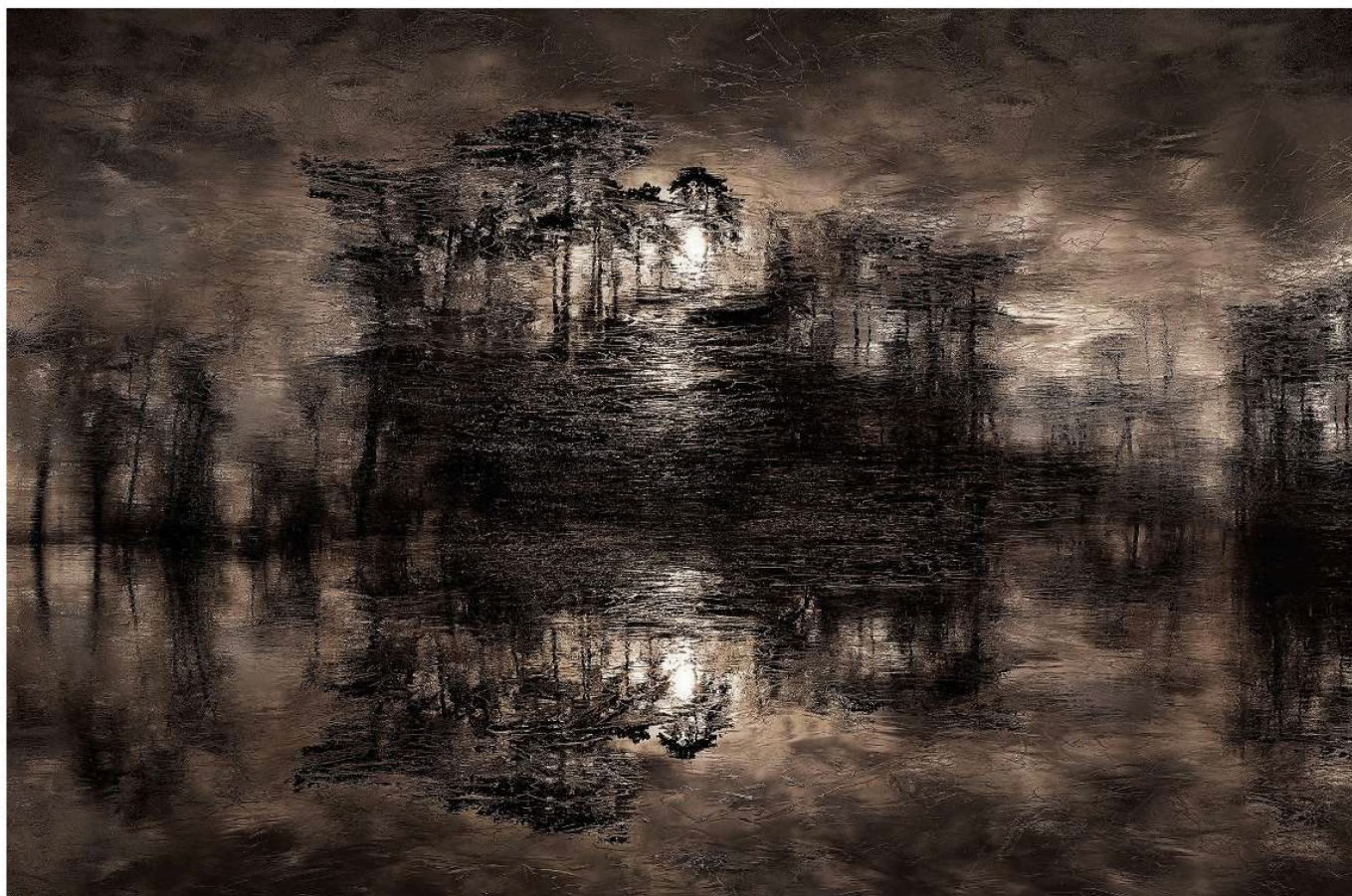
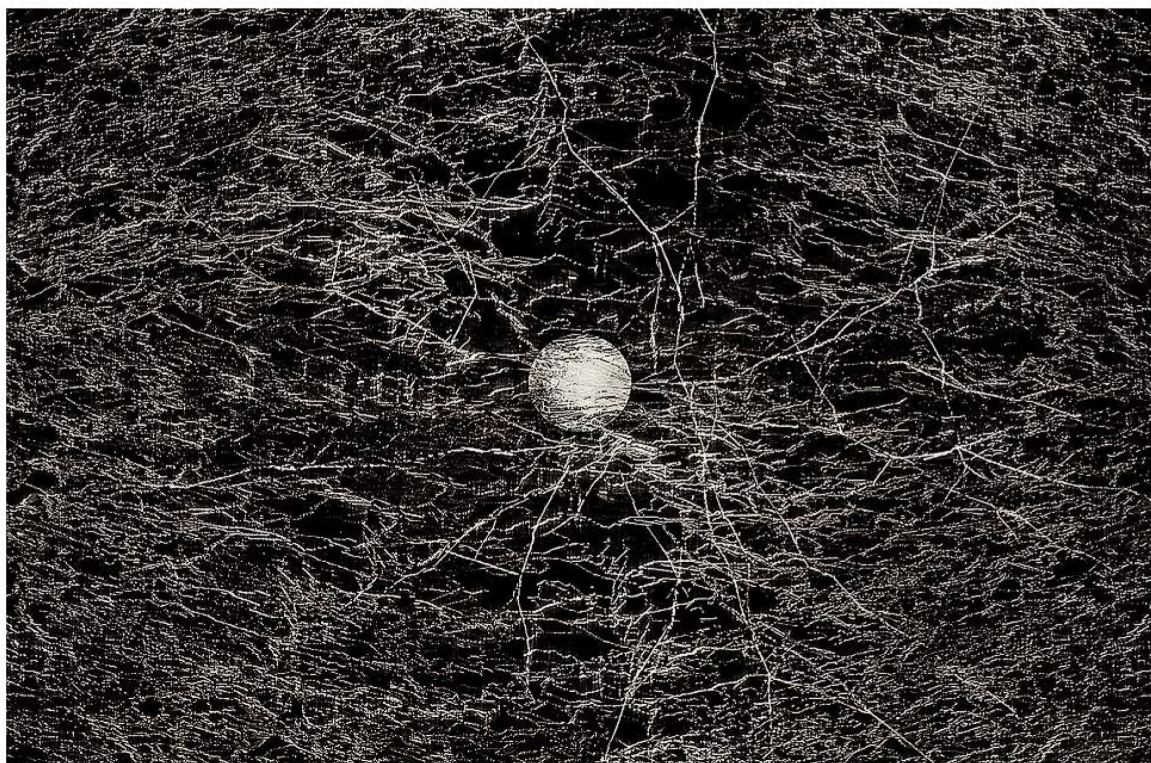
This quest led her to create a new work for the Bee Barn (*Matière-lumière*, ML-V-22-0207, 2022), which consists in a large translucent "veil" placed over a pool of water, animated by light and wind to the vibrant sound of a gong. The artist, who has long blond hair and an intense gaze, who has been living and working in Paris for twenty years, conceived a sort of large



"millefeuille" in plastic film that she shapes layer after layer with India ink, pigments and the ashes from copies of poetic texts—excerpts from the mystical poet Rumi, the author of *Night and Sleep*, Rainer Maria Rilke and medieval mystics—that she has burned, forming a palimpsest. As the sound changes, light projections successively uncover parts of this moving "canvas", suspended in a half-light, revealing shifting shapes: mineral, vegetable, animal, even a character that appeared for the first time in Evi Keller's abstract work. "A kind of archaic pilgrim who guides us towards future worlds", says this alchemist, who creates a cosmos with paintbrushes made of light.

Above:
Evi Keller,
Matière-Lumière,
installation in
the Bee Barn
© ÉRIC SANDER

On the left
and below:
Evi Keller,
Matière-Lumière
[Towards the
Light - Silent
Transformations],
video presented
in the gallery of
the Grande Écurie
© EVI KELLER/
COURTESY JEANNE
BUCHER JAEGER, PARIS





Evi Keller, *Matière-Lumière ML-V-22-0207*, 2022 (detail), Creation presented during the Art Season 2022, Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, France