



1968, oil on canvas, 40 by 44 inches. Rosa Esman.

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MIKAEL LEVIN

Twining

Just as Henry David Thoreau used Wal-
den Pond as a focus for his philosophical
meditations, so photographer Mikael Levin
focuses on Ericbergssjön, a large pond in
the Swedish interior. Levin spent the sum-
mers from 1983 through 1987 in this idyl-
lic, utterly unspoiled setting photographing



Mikael Levin, *Untitled* (diptych), 1986, black-and-white photograph, 8 by 20 inches. Twining.

the pond and its surroundings. Nine black-
and-white diptychs of these “romantic
landscapes,” as the artist terms them, were
featured in this show. A more extensive
selection of Levin’s work can be seen in his
book *Silent Passage*, recently published by
Hudson Hills Press.

Levin’s diptychs are remarkably still,
reflective works that convey the beauty and
quiet power of nature without becoming
sentimental. There is no hint of human—or
even animal—presence, apart from a small
rowboat in one of the images. Instead, the
subjects of Levin’s contemplation are the
sky; the mirrorlike surface of the water; the
flowers, trees, and rocks along the shore;
and the delicate interactions among all
these elements.

The diptychs depict adjacent halves of a
landscape; in the most interesting works
there are subtle differences between the two
panels, creating a noticeable but nonthreat-
ening tension. In one diptych, for example,
the left-hand panel shows a thickly wooded
patch of landscape that gives way, in the
right-hand panel, to an area of grassier,
sparser vegetation. The juxtaposition of the
two halves—one shadowy and impenetra-
ble, the other light-filled and open—pro-
vides a striking contrast. In another diptych
a dense stand of leafy trees and its dark
reflection on the water give the left-hand
panel just a touch of ominous mystery,
while the right-hand panel presents a sunnier
view of the calm lake, with the forested
shore at a considerable distance.

Such contrasts do not detract from the
overriding sense of tranquillity and harmo-
ny that dominates these images. Rather,
they inspire us to ponder nature in all its
complex diversity, and make us long for a
Walden or an Ericbergssjön of our own.

—J. S.