

Brenda Draney

Break

12.09. – 24.10.2020

Opening as part of Various Others 2020: 11.09.2020, 3 – 9 pm

„One of my anthropology professors said that we might think of ourselves as an archipelago, and technology as the water surrounding us. His point was that we are becoming increasingly disparate islands as the water rises. Yet, this distancing might be something that also connects us the way a funeral might bring family together: we are only as healthy as the most vulnerable among us.”
(Brenda Draney during the preparations for her exhibition „Break”)

Break

In Brenda Draney's paintings, a worldview dominates that appears intimate but at the same time is distant from the artist herself. In particular, Draney's artistic practice derives from her personal and institutional experiences as an indigenous woman living in Canada. Draney is Cree of the Sawridge First Nation, Treaty 8, with a strong connection to the area around Slave Lake, a small town a few hundred kilometers northwest of Edmonton, the capital of the Canadian province of Alberta. Slave Lake is at the center of this vast rural area; all administration of the Sawridge First Nation reservation happens from here. Draney was born in 1976, and like many of her generation, moved to Edmonton to study English after graduating from high school. Later she studied at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, the school where many well-known Canadian conceptual artists studied.

The pictures Draney has created since then address real-life events as everyday, individual fates, but staged in a decidedly hermetic way. The search for an identification with one's own origins, as well as the observation and analysis of the dramatic social changes of our present moment, characterize the artist's visual worlds. Draney repeatedly addresses private moments and biographical circumstances. Her imagery offers just enough information to enable access to the subject. On the one hand, the viewer can develop their own narratives based on what is shown; on the other hand, emphatically narrative pictorial gaps remain. These conscious gaps and free spaces create a tension between faith in the image's capacity to thematize one's own biography, however fragile, and a generalization that positions reality in thrall to a pronounced subjectivism.

At the center of her painterly compositions, Draney places personal stories and episodes along with things from her surroundings. Strong brushstrokes meet an intuitive, gestural color scheme, which creates the impression of agreement between real experience and the abstract image. These paintings are not just self-reflection, but an act of self-assertion. Draney continually breaks up her painterly continuum. In this way, she sketches a painterly approach to the complexity of her world without revealing the terms of her appropriation of it. Rather, it seems as if the pictures revolve around a reality that is ultimately unrepresentable in the mode of figurative painting. In Draney's work, everyday reality, which is inescapable yet actually incomprehensible, is almost inevitably absorbed in a personal, for us only seemingly tangible, realism.

Nicolaus Schafhausen