

An exhibition of changes in 40 books 2009-2011

In the flurry of delimited and networked aesthetics which gained global intensity around the turn of the millennium, it could appear as if Helmut Dorners art has become a bit too quiet for this world. The rumble of a new utopian departure was ignited by visions of all-embracing communication and hybridisation the concentrated dialogue between artist and picture typical of Dorners, on the other hand, his excursions through the inner jungle of colours, forms and materials, the absence of the explicitly political, but also of demonstrative decorativeness, may appear to some as having lost touch with the times, as a residuum of purist art obliged only to itself.

All recent signs point to artistic research integrative, adaptive, beneficial art as a flexible trump card in the chain of economic, scientific and political value creation. The non-identity of the fine arts as stewards of things that are no longer blemished by exchange (T. W. Adorno) is in this context easily suspected of refusing multifunctionality, appearing as snobbish art pour art.

However, Helmut Dorners new drawings on view at Kadel-Willborn can be regarded as an indication that today it is precisely the alleged art for arts sake that is again unfolding a productive and critical life of its own. The show *The Table - The Waves - Flusstück* displays 40 books specially bound for the exhibition with around 1065 coloured pencil drawings placed on narrow wall consoles and low tables on the gallery floor, where the pages of the opened books remind one of the waves of a river. Their variegated crests form colour moods that are at times minimalistic, at others lavish, at times gestural, at others geometric; impressions and improvisations that have detached themselves from the concrete impression and become a concrete impression themselves. Occasionally, fragments of words are washed to the surface, ironic comments countering the appearance of abstract detachedness. What makes these works resting and animated in themselves seem so fresh, despite the fact that they may initially trigger associations to the serialism of classical modernism, on the one hand, and the early purism of documenta modernism, on the other?

The answer is of a dialectical nature. No artefact, no artwork is evident in regard to its effect. Precisely because art obliged to itself is no longer a key medium, it is in a position to unfold new facets of meaning. In the light of an increasingly synchronised and integrated contemporary culture, Dorners works are characterised by the insistence on the primacy of the individuals relation to the world, the individual who continues to perceive and interpret his inner and outer environment, amid increasingly dense integration and bonds, decidedly as an individual. In doing so, he is less committed to the myth of the autonomous individual or the enigmatic image of the artist working outside of art history, than to the intuition that even in times of new collective singulars such as

globalisation the individual lives as a sensuous being in specific places, in specific climates, under specific light conditions, with a specific biographical background, guided by specific knowledge, all of which can never be completely absorbed by more anonymous contexts the latter are factored into the latency of individuality anyway. To again cite Adorno: Aesthetic autonomy encompasses what is collectively most advanced. By virtue of its mimetic preindividual elements, every idiosyncrasy lives from collective forces of which it is unconscious.

Dorner's drawings were and are made against this background. They can only insufficiently be described as abstract. Whom we meet in Dorner is instead a genuine phenomenologist. He is concerned with the path to the things themselves (Edmund Husserl) understood as a process, yet these things exist and this is the fruitful paradox of all variants of phenomenology only as appearances to the subject and his (memorial) lifeworld (Lebenswelt). In this world, marginalia also play a role that are globally seen insignificant. A fleeting childhood memory of the reflecting surface of a river. The simultaneous, constantly changing incidence of light through the studio window. The convergence of interior and exterior images in the open and ultimately interminable process of creativity.

In this respect, Dorner's series can be understood as an indeed defiant attempt at a primary experience articulating itself in drawing, whose high degree of abstraction forms a firewall against rash identification offers. Exactly for this reason, it develops in the context-obsessed context of our times a dimension implicitly critical of the times, since primary experiences are deemed completely impossible. But if art is familiar with a form of freedom, then that of in spite of.

Hence, Dorner himself sees the freedom of the artist not as the freedom of a sovereign: The freedom of the artist is the freedom of a rat in a sewer.

-Jörg Scheller

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