

David Weiss
Neocolor

In one of his *Neocolor* works, David Weiss (1946-2012) carves out a small universe of a drawing out of a surface of black — sticky — matter; lines, scratches, orbits, tiny freckles of distant stars, arrows pointing towards an implied centre and then away, dispersed as if after a collision. Outwards and outwards, traces of routes of the world turning, of dynamic shifts pointing towards the end of an era and a language, the better devil of the world as it was up until then known, ending. On the corner of the paper, a script decodes “the mystery of the lines”: it is the map of the Migration Period, where lines indicate both stasis and movement; invasions by Goths, Huns, and Vandals, masses of people stepping down ancient roads, a period which marked the end of the Roman Empire. A map of impermanent geography, tumultuous, spanning across centuries, captured gleefully as if by a child’s simple yet brilliant mind.

These drawings — made between 1977 and 1979 — are named after the Caran D’Ache wax pastels *Neocolor*, a product which came out around the same time and is still produced today albeit with an expanded colour palette. They were made right before the fated encounter with Peter Fischli turned into a lifelong collaboration and in them are traces — scratches! — of a future life’s template, major themes that would emerge throughout the years in the artistic duo’s philosophical, slapstick and life-affirming works.

The method of how they are made is familiar (or was — maybe it’s generational) to many children and adults through early school art classes. The pastels are used to form the first stratum of the drawing. Their bright, joyful colours are applied with pressure onto the paper until they cover its entire surface with their luminous, highly pigmented flesh. This fatty ground is then painted over with a layer of black which conceals the joyful palette under its shadow. The drawing is made by scraping off the top layer with the use of a sharp nib so that through its erasure the colourful substrate comes through as outline, as negative, as luminous wound.

In these works, black often functions as atmospheric nightscape. Whether in the dark alleys of a city, in the dimly lit interiors of an apartment, or as an indistinct, vast backdrop to visions, each drawing is a small world. A cloaked woman looks at us with a penetrative gaze while another, whose eyes are hidden behind what looks like a sleek VR headset, looks out far into something that is not us, clairvoyant and possessed. A pair of crystal glass creatures — a duet — out on the town spill their insides out onto the streets while the city lights’ warm glow is flickering in the background. Later, a wider spill: on the edge of a sidewalk the glass creature with its tiny friend the cigarette butt are both passed out. A drumset vibrates to its own beat and three swirling figures push through a headwind of opposing forces. These are but a few inhabitants of these worlds. Here, Weiss emerges as a highly skilled draftsman. His every line is confident, precise and fluid, sign of a hand that captures at mind’s speed.

As evident in the entirety of his early work, which he decided to organise towards the end of his life, David Weiss made and used drawing in many of its applications and forms. He used it as storytelling device in comics, in paintings, in preparatory sketches and it is easy to see how this engagement seeped into the future in works made with Peter Fischli. Drawing’s possibilities of range and speed combined with the lightness of note taking is particularly apparent in works like *Suddenly This Overview* (1981-2012), or in character sketches like *Rat and Bear* (1981-2010) — the duo’s alter egos — where David Weiss’s laconic and deadpan wit shines through like the prismatic colours of the substrata.

In one of the *Neocolor* works, three figures sit behind a vitrine and peer through the glass “We gazed out, mesmerized, in awe of so much beauty” spells the text. If this “out” refers to the world in all its wildness or just an organised copy of it behind glass, remains unclear.