

Jens Hanke: Synapsale Nachbilder

Jens Hanke's *Synapsalen Nachbilder* (Synapsal Afterimages) are created using simple, almost archaic materials: charcoal on paper primed with bone glue. At first glance, the works seem objective. All linear structures with a powerfully spatial impact, they look like blueprints, but without ever clearly revealing the object being depicted. The impression of a refined sketch is also underscored by the eraser marks that show prior variations and attempts. Apparently, everything here was exactly planned, calculated, discarded, or found.

As we view these works, various associations come involuntarily to mind from realms as diverse as technology, biology, architecture, everyday life, art history, or even neuronal structures. But the viewer will never be able to find a precise name for what he sees. The drawings play in a perfidious way with the familiar, but without allowing the sculptural constructs to actually emerge from the mental image and become identifiable.

The formations can either be seen as monumental structures or elements of a nanoworld seen through a scanning microscope. This disturbing ambiguity is based on the almost complete lack of a horizon, which would otherwise provide a minimum of orientation. The ground of the paper sometimes appears to be a surface on which something lies, but in other cases looks like a space that envelops the seemingly floating bodies, or even penetrates them. Often, negative and positive forms are linked to one another and take each other to the extreme.

What first seems rationally constructed reveals itself to be a virtuosic play with our perception. The wandering gaze of the viewer, seeking insight, is frequently tricked and teased: what we see is repeatedly questioned, but in a much more subtle way than takes place in the popular prints of M. C. Escher.

Even if the individual sheets can be distinguished through their extremely varied visual structure and various "subjects" into distinct systems of classification, they can still clearly be understood as parts of a series that emerges in the combination of endless variations and mutations. Once the viewer is caught in the intense emanation of the works, the works never become boring, because of their constant variation. They consist of lovely lines and a great degree of mystery.

It also seems difficult to determine when the drawings were made. The yellowish foundation appears to be of a venerable old age, so that the works refer to various eras of art history (for example, the early twentieth century) that they seem to correspond to formally, as quite old-fashioned creations of futuristic thought. The contradictory and unnameable aspect of the drawings also explains the programmatic titles of the series. The drawings

appear almost as ungraspable as the after-images on our retina that form with our eyes closed of spectral outlines, depicting something real, but not allowing it to come to recognition. They appear as a reminder of something that we cannot remember. The drawings are at the same time placed like virtual anchors in our world that is drifting apart.

Are the titles a key to understanding the images? And why does a German artist use English titles? They consist mostly of concise, sometimes fragmentary sentences or phrases that seem as coincidental as they are hermetic. It almost seems as if the thoughts expressed here are the true subjects of the drawings, as if they completed the process of thinking or speaking on their own and illustrated a conceptual process. The foreign language words result from conceptual scraps that emerge while drawing. English seems to be a filter between everyday thought and the artistic process.

The drawings show autonomous shapes that exist without any real link to the world of the visual. They are thus capriccios, the expression of absurd, disturbing and uncontrolled thoughts that materialize and can only be understood in part. The rest remains autonomous form that seems to exist for itself, but within it dwells a higher purpose.

Dr. Martin Steffens

Translated by Brian Currid