

Monica Ursina Jäger - Landscapes of No Return



A small wooden hut stands in a clearing in a forest. Shrubs, individual trees, the roof are all bathed in bright light. Darkness prevails all around, nothing is stirring. An air of neglect, of loneliness inhabits the scene that seems to be removed from time and space. The depiction is confusing, disturbing and yet at the same time has something familiar about it. Etched into the gently curved glass screen of a monitor tube, the image forms between the hard, smooth surface and the scraped-off markings. On the evidence of the dark sections, it is as if one is able to look at the inside of the body of the object, one is able to measure the space behind the image residing in the depths.

Monica Ursina Jäger has entitled this series »remains of reminiscence« in which she deploys cathode ray tubes as drawing supports. In place of electronically produced sequences of movement, static images form on the immobile screens—images whose appearance resides in the reflection of light on the rough surface of the finely engraved sections. Landscapes, views of deserted streets or the fringes of urban habitation provide the source from which Jäger duly selects the templates for her ›nocturnes‹. The special technical transformation, which results in a certain blurring of the depicted scenes further strengthens the impression of something essentially prototypical inherent in the choice of motif. The relatively random, unspectacular situations undergo an emotional charging as a result of the process of transference; they leave the documentary arena and coalesce as fictional moments on the tube. Like schematic shards of memory, they glimmer on the blank screen, seemingly illuminating themselves from within the memory of the monitors.

Monica Ursina Jäger's artistic position is characterised by an engagement with mankind's ›organic‹, fabricated and constructed environment and milieu. In drawings in ink, sculptures and objects, she explores the dynamic tension inherent in the differently determined views of nature, of landscape and architecture as socially, societally and culturally charged spatial constructions, as well as utopian categories. Mediated forms of representation of these specific topoi duly form the basis of a process, which the artist uses to question customary patterns of perception and attribution, transferring them to new contexts. The sustained, formal abstraction and subtle splicing of seemingly irreconcilable elements mark out the vertices of an artistic strategy, which finds its realization in brittle, visionary pictorial formulations. In this way Jäger radically reduces the subject in the drawings to the starkness of black and white, dissolving it in a collection of abstract, ›androgynous‹ and equivocally characterised surfaces that eschew decipherment as pictorial objects when subject to careful scrutiny: mountain ranges mutate into cloud formations, expanses of water and sky merge with one another. Nature and urban structures, geological terrain and architectural form fuse to form hybrid ›views‹ that for their part are imbued with utopian

potential in the multiperspectival, pictorial spaces in which the different landscape elements and relics of civilisation are incorporated like pieces of scenery. The precise use of lighting and painterly rendering in the drawing have the power—by dint of formal means—to ›smooth over‹ any thematic rupturing, lending the individual compositions the quality of a statement: they postulate a reference to reality, albeit constantly subverted by the deconstruction of the traditional space-time continuum, but one which perpetually indicates its inherent potential.

Similar procedures can also be observed with regard to the sculptures. The surface structure of the tree trunks, branches and twigs is sealed as it were beneath a shiny black layer, its very materiality erased. The prosthetically articulated, technical devices (including tripods, microphones, antennae), whose ›natural elements‹ can hardly be distinguished externally from the non-natural ones, intensify the impression of constructed form which is located in the intermediary area between nature and culture. Situated beyond any bipolar codification and systemisation, these works develop an independent existence out of their inherent ambiguity and hybridity.

Irene Müller, art historian, independent curator and art writer, 2009

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