

The Pictures of Christiane Bruhns

In an exhibition I saw pictures touching me at the core, they are silent pictures, some of which jolt me in a subtle powerful way, pictures that seem to know me. Rarely does contemporary art touch me to this degree. I learn that these pictures are works of the painteress Christiane Bruhns. Some weeks later on I have the option to meet Christiane Bruhns in her studio in Hamburg.

At the first glance, it is certain that work is being done here with meticulous precision, a scientist, an alchemist is operating here. The studio is tidy, from the floor to the high ceiling all walls are covered with works in the different stades of their genesis. The artist is restless, I am taking up her precious time, the things she has to do do not permit delays, she appears to me like an alert, clear person driven by her creation.

While still looking around I sit down on the sofa and begin to take some notes, whereupon my hostess relaxes somehow. I am allowed to stay, to pose questions, Bruhns is not used to talking about her work.

Bruhns draws by the view, sketchily, focusing on what she sees, what surrounds her. Very few of the sketches contain enough potential to be selected by the artist, one such drawing is hung up in the studio. Things look already busy there, continuously growing piles of drawings come across like drawings of a sculptor. In fact, Bruhns studied sculpting. When later the drawing is being transferred to its final size the formal composition finds an increase in reduction and intensification. Now oil paint is being applied by a palm-sized rubber blade. Most of the areas are monochrome, few exceptions show coloured areas painterly broken up. To apply oil paint with a blade so evenly affords hours of concentrated work, an effort that turns into easiness in the pictures. While evolving, the pictures change their mood a number of times until the composition begins to sound.

I have the impression to have grasped everything on the surface roughly. I ask for a break, a short walk, express my hope to advance to a deeper level upon return, hoping to find an explanation how the gentle spell enters the pictures.

After half of our short walkabout Bruhns suddenly says, "I see colours again". I dig deeper, especially in the darker half of the year she focuses on the often shrill chromaticity of her urban surroundings. I am not astonished, her vehement and precise use of colours must derive from something.

Is Bruhns a paintress at all, her works settle somewhere between painting - sculptural coloured figures – coloured drawings. Bruhns' monochrome area is equally painting as it is the refusal of painting, it is a way of painting that hardly allows any of the many possibilities of painting. It is a sculptural experiment on the stage of painting.

The structure of the works resemble: it is every time something like an object, like a picture of an object in space. Every picture has its own character, its own inner being. In some, humour flashes, in some scaring, magic in others, also triteness or strangeness. However, everything is withdrawn in the pictures.

The strength of the devices and the aspects and subjects of the picture seem to be aiming into the picture. Their dynamic is forced into their interior, so that a gentle powerful pressure overload arises. Everything in and around these pictures appears familiar to the beholder, its presence seems understood.

I am most moved by those pictures that are of an inexpressible truthfulness, and seem to carry something of the ultimate, the essence of being in themselves. "I am not interested in theory of pictures etc.", says Bruhns. Aerodynamics engineers cannot fly, birds do. Related to arts, Bruhn can fly, silently and high.

Having discussed all, at high time for me to leave, I can think it all over again, it is good to have come on foot. I have not thanked her appropriately, will simply send her the text. On my way home I see colours.

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Back to Bruhns' pictures. Where can the pictures be categorized? Where are the cultural roots? In which context can this oeuvre be understood?

The early romanticist Schlegel's demand from art to "relativise the finite by the infinite" can be understood the more precisely against the background of the idea of nature that was compartmentalised in the Age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment which brought us the idea that the fate of humans is regulated better by reason than by Divine mercy, religion etc., is a crucial step in the evolution of mankind.

The firstly mainly political use of reason was followed by the application of reason universally, which since then has penetrated more and more areas of human cultures. On the other hand, applying the principle of reason implies constricting the conception of the world to what is understandable

and feasible, it is a prerequisite for technical progress, for the devaluation of the world to a source of raw materials, and for the subjugation of all spheres of life to market laws. Today, since we have extirpated even the last indigenous peoples who had ruled their life and cohabitation with the animated world by communicating with nature, gods and spirits, the Anima Mundi finds asylum in the Fine Arts.

From this point of view, Christiane Bruhns' approach as a paintress appears to me all the more touching, because she seems to search after the soul in the objects. That she deconstructs something as trite as the visual appearance of a milk carton as long as a bit of the magic of the Anima Mundi can be traced in this picture.

To sense the ultimate that cannot be depicted, the essence in reality that art is able to show up approaches to, is the subject of Bruhns' research. It brings to my mind that our evolution of mankind has not been completed.

[Rolf Bergmeier, Hamburg, December 2012]