

Bastian Muhr – Schwarzbunt

During his residency at the ISCP (International Studio & Curatorial Program) in New York in 2015, Bastian Muhr began to reduce objects to their basic form which he had noticed and observed throughout the day, sketching their contours on paper. Without arranging them into any kind of narrative, he assembled geometric or organic forms which he later transferred onto white paper using graphite pencil – in ever-new variations, at least one sheet every day, comparable to a diary. Hanne Darboven's conceptual series of drawings inevitably come to mind, yet without her stringent temporal and mathematical approach. In Bastian Muhr's artistic quest to translate his observations into a serial system of reduced symbols, an alphabet of minimal forms akin to pictograms emerged.

Upon his return to Leipzig, Muhr carried on this style of drawing on the basis of minimal symbols – to this very day. He has retained some aspects of the technique as it satisfies his understanding of a successful relationship between line and surface, form and content. Yet other aspects have been rejected, such as when the drawings turned out to be too close to reality and became mere illustrations or when they were too abstract to bear any meaning for him. These discarded sheets – which Bastian Muhr considers testimonies of the imperfect – provide the basis of a new group of drawings on paper that are currently on display at Galerie Jochen Hempel. In them, the artist has filled the empty spaces between the lines of the sheets previously put aside with intricate hatching using a graphite pencil with a hardness grade of 6B – again, at least one sheet every day. The norm of the same A4 paper format provides consistent uniformity among the sheets, with the variety of forms revealing extraordinary vividness thanks to the artist's dextrous art in applying regular, even hatching. Repetition is an essential feature of this series, the recurrent gesture of the line concentrating to form surfaces and camouflaging the basic form of the line previously dismissed.

The imperfect line that searches the straight one, never attaining perfection, is a challenge to norm and system alike. Reflecting on his environment that is based on norms and standardisations, Bastian Muhr develops a new artistic code only to promptly undermine this very systematisation. Amidst the diametrical relationship

between both norm and deviation, his complexes of signs represent chimaera of the systems theory. They mimic the perfection of information technology's access to the world, which – with the Internet as our primary medium of communication – has shaped our life more than anything else. Muhr challenges the beauty of the algorithm, which formed his own conceptual and sensorial development with the first computer games of the 1980s, on the basis of his aesthetic of the line drawn freehand: the line that is thus not perfect. It is an almost defiant, nostalgic gesture which does not surrender to impulsive quivers or an *écriture automatique*, but rather stems from the artist's own genesis of failure in order to open up and conquer new artistic worlds in the format of the A4 page – in an intuitive yet controlled, orderly manner. With his manual artistic approach, Bastian Muhr clearly sets himself apart from media-reflexive tendencies in painting as seen, for instance, in the work of Wade Guyton, who negates all traces of an individual human signature by taking images from the Internet or using word-processing software and an ink-jet printer to transfer them onto the canvas.

Bastian Muhr's principle of controlled intuition and broken standards also resurfaces in his paintings as coloured variations, their conceptual origin going back to the drawings of reduced forms begun in New York. His large-format painting is graphic in style, the brush stroke defining its pictorial surface; both form and colours are abstract without tending towards pure abstraction and concrete art. As coloured pictograms conveying the artist's world view, his painterly work moves between the opposite poles of symbol and abstraction. Colour nuances that are never too detailed help to avoid any sense of local colour which would create space and illusion. By making use of colour and suggested forms, however, Bastian Muhr generates chains of associations that evoke ideas of landscape, people and objects only to be renounced at the very next glance. Oscillating between perception and awareness, failure is predetermined – or as the band Die Sterne sang in 2002: "Wahr ist, was wahr ist // dass das, was war, nicht mehr da ist" (It's true what's true // that what once was no longer is).

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