

“The Substance of all Art”

Potter-Mael works in Rangsdorf

(Arno Neumann, art historian and critic for *Maerkische Allgemeine*, 2000; translation from German)

In works of art “documentation” is an unusual concept. However, Brigitte Potter-Mael, from Vancouver, Canada, uses this word frequently. Her monochromatic and colourful works don't follow the rules of *Sachlichkeit* or an objective scientific approach that is usually associated with that word. How then is it linked?

The works that are exhibited by Brigitte Potter-Mael at the “*Kunstfluegel*” were made between 1997 and 2000. She lives in Vancouver since 1995. Following a “life-changing travel around the world” – as she states –, she studied fine art at Concordia University in Montreal and works at Malaspina printstudio in Vancouver. In Rangsdorf, Brigitte Potter-Mael shows a selection from her printed works, mostly series, variations on themes such as “Aspects of Aphrodite”, “Healing”, “Journal Excerpts” and “Word-Weavings”.

To explain images in their artistic substance is difficult. A sheer impossibility when it comes to Brigitte Potter-Mael's work. Every square centimetre is an aesthetic event. Most of the series are stone-lithographs printed on handmade papers in which images are created by a method of photo-copying structures and writings, transfers onto litho-stones, and juxtapositions of graphic marks and surfaces that are worked into the print. Thus, each print is multi-layered, not only in a technical sense. There are the writings from journals layered with elements from plants, traces of folds from cloth, thread-structures, colour-surfaces and colour-traces.

Brigitte Potter-Mael calls this a “layering of time and signs”. Again and again excerpts from journal pages create a background for her prints. “Artistically and philosophically these texts act as guides, reflecting my development as a thinking and acting human being.”

The event of this exhibition is the realisation and translation of this development, this life-profile, and its transmission in the original imagery. As an example, let us mention “Aphrodite”. In remembrance of the myth of the eternally desired and often enflamed goddess of beauty we search for fragments of amorous adventures, as painters of the Baroque would have liked it. We find, instead, but wonderfully sensitive light-dark structures, intentional at random placed folds of cloth, modestly held back and calming surfaces. The form still vibrates, isn't paralysed, but has been calmed in the image's rendition.

In general, these works come to life through a tension between order and randomness, often accentuated by a thread which runs, similar to a life-nerve, through the image. When resting in front of this image, the sensibility of a sophisticated artistic signature and the values of stillness increase, while the viewer's fantasy, searching for meaning, may discover a certain corporeality in signs that had appeared to be mere abstractions. Surprised, one realises to find oneself in the midst of the Aphrodite myth; not in this women's turbulent endeavours but, much beyond the reach of time, in the essence of her search for fulfilment.

The beckoning question what Brigitte Potter-Mael might mean by “Documentation” seems to have found an answer: to reflect a lived life and to keep it from escaping. She succeeds to do even more. She finds the way to the substance of all art. That is, to seize the undeniable coincidences in a human being's existence, to expose the vulnerability of emotions, thoughts, dreams and fears and to tie these personal experiences into a completed and signifying form. Art-making is thus the most intimate and most immediate possibility to store human existence in the body of an artwork. One shouldn't be too hasty, but this exhibition with Brigitte Potter-Mael's works seems, in my opinion, to be one of the most important exhibitions of this year in the “*Kunstfluegel*”. What will follow after will have a difficult time to take its place.