

Stations (of a trace-seeker)

An artist looks back ten years into his past. But Hans Kotter is too young to allow us to term this act of looking back a "retrospective" in the classical sense. Looking backwards means rendering past production into the present. It requires distance towards one's own work and it effects a rupture in one's personal creative tradition. Looking back into the past work of an artist gives an external observer the opportunity to discern developmental structures within his "oeuvre". Through the features common to the single works fundamental interests come to view and ruptures signalise probable crises. One tends generally to construct a line of development which should optimally lead to a point of maximum perfection. However, this model of linear historical development, which has influenced the writing of art history since Vasari's "Vitae", is questionable. Where is the biography that runs along a straight line, even if the thirst for perfection might serve to generate creativity?

We shall not look back ten years into Hans Kotter's past work with the purpose of identifying development. We shall rather halt at different stations and discover thereby certain fundamental aspects regarding the artist's interest and mode of work.

The vitality of Hans Kotter's work stems from a playful interaction with material. His artistic origins lie in painting. In the year 1992 we see him realising his first plexi-glass object suspended in free space. During this period of profuse experimentation three-dimensional works and material-images emerge. In his series "talk to me", "daydream" and "Körpersprache" ("body-language") during the short period between 1993 and 1994 Kotter returns to conventional tabloid-painting before turning to other material types. Hereafter his work will consist in introducing things past and things found into new contexts, so as to transform them in form and content. In his search for new modes of expression he applies liquids for the first time in 1994. The series entitled "Empfindliches Gleichgewicht" ("sensitive balance") may be judged a precursor of "Blue Line" produced in 2001 and applying silicon oil and water. In "Memory" (1995) his experimentation manifests itself in a more complex manner. The memory pictures from the children's game encourage the viewer to look for what is assumed to exist in duplicates. The world of images thereby discovered symbolizes the multiplicity of life brought to order through exposure to a systematic gaze. However, the beautiful illusion of an intact world cannot withstand a keener look, neither here nor in later works. The series "Tagebuch" ("Diary") (1997) suggests, in opposition to "Memory", an increased accent on intimacy. The title itself suggests that the objects presented in glass and light are clues from the artist's life: childhood relicts and findings in an even mixture of significance and insignificance, all of them aesthetically heightened and charged up with aura. It is comparable with "Stilleben" ("Still life") (1999), only that the objects and material-types here combine to tell their tale, although formally in quite a different mode. A fundamental formal extension of Kotter's work is undertaken by "Tagebuch" ("Diary") for the first time: through the application of resin blocks and the introduction of light and sound.

The different objects in "Stilleben" ("Still life") are presented in show-cases hanging down from the ceiling in a less intimate but no less associative manner. Here also objects are conserved to their eternity in resin and confronted with other objects. With them the traditional subject of nature morte, familiarized and influenced in content by centuries of painting tradition, is taken up and translated into a new language of forms. The aesthetics and purity of form and material stand at the centre of interest. The series "Landscapes in plastic" (2000) is connected with "Tagebuch" ("Diary") and "Stilleben" ("Still life"). With the landscapes Kotter approaches another topic burdened with painting tradition. But he imbeds the subject-matter into blocks of resin presented in protective plastic cases. The blocks encasing conserved objets trouvés of everyday life contain reserves of history turned into image. But also here we have not a history shared by society, but a private and subjective history.

In many of his works Hans Kotter balances himself consciously on the thin edge between an aesthetics of material and a transformation of material into fetish. The unconventional use of resin or silicon oil serves to present the individual enclosed objects. Now and then the aesthetic pleasure threatens to cover up the

layer of the metaphor. In his photographic works like "Snapshots" (1999) or "Licht und Farbe" ("Light and Colour") (...) he transposes once more this aesthetics into new media and environmental connections.

However, some of his works break this personal tradition of superfluous visual stimuli. The early work "Target" (...) could be included here, as well as "Sauber Glänzend Rein" ("Clean, shining, pure") (1999) and "Blue Line" (2001). Specially in the last mentioned environment Kotter does not present a minute archiving of the things of this world in resin or oil. He rather confronts the viewer with the sublime experience of nature. In ten varying glass vessels containing only water or blue silicon oil the apparition of a continuous, free-floating line is evoked. This line suggests the horizon and awakens the longing for the distant. This is perhaps the most contemplative of Hans Kotter works, standing as it does at the end of the past looked back into.

In an age in which artists are preoccupied with digital images and virtual worlds, Kotter has remained true to the object. His work is a homage to the things of this world. These are things constituting our world, things determining our life and giving wings to the world of our thought. Kotter's artistic world is on the one hand a factual world in which his activity consists in shaping, experimenting, creating. On the other hand it is a metaphorical world in which the things are transposed into a new and almost spiritual mode of being. As Cornelia Kleyboldt puts it, Kotter is "at the same time technocrat and poet" ("Spurensicherung"). His skill in dealing with different material types, his instinctive sense for form, colour and composition and his sensitive treatment of major themes will certainly determine his path also in the future.

Dr. Christian Schoen