

Nicola Schrudde
[CUFH] A Staged
Painterly Landscape

Nicola Schrudde the sculptress once compared her installations to Claude Monet's paintings. This might at first seem surprising, but proves to be very apt: it is of course the light which a painter like Monet uses to structure the picture planes and create three-dimensional effects. Light, and colour as a special manifestation of light, is just as important to Nicola Schrudde as traditional sculptural media, in this case clay and copper. And there is a further aspect: the impressionist moment! In Monet's work, the surface in a state of flux, never allowing the eye to come to rest, is precisely about the fact that the instant frozen in the picture never appears in reality in this way, given that landscape can only be experienced as a constantly changing situation. This experience is what Nicola Schrudde makes available to the viewers, when they plunge into her spatial installation and apprehend it from ever-shifting perspectives.

What we see is not a static immutable scene consisting of a hall of particular dimensions (8.50 meters high x 21.50 wide x 26.20 deep), in which so and so many items are distributed. That is not the art work, but only the given situation, which by the act of seeing is transformed into a sensual vision. Just as landscape is not a priori harmonious, but can only be appreciated as aesthetically meaningful when looked at in a certain way. In painting, the discovery of landscape went hand-in-hand with the discovery of light. In early landscapes of the 15th century (a Jan van Eyck, for example) the crystalline clarity of a landscape receding towards the horizon to become blueish in colour was exalted as an atmospheric marvel. In the Flottmann-Hallen, the fantastic daylight entering from above creates a highly charged atmosphere. The light plays a crucial role in this exhibition. The changing moods of

illumination and colour add a special ingredient. As the light alters with any shift in one's own position, angle of vision, or the eye focusing close to or far off, viewing becomes a process of ever-changing new experiences and novel readings. This intense encounter may so captivate the senses that time seems to stand still. The contemplative involvement in looking is quite different to a mere registration of facts.

Let's now take a look at the individual constituents of the *mise-en-scène* which Nicola Schrudde presents to us as a "painterly landscape". There are about 150 copper panels, most of them laid out flat on the floor. The highly reflective surfaces animate the soft mutually differentiated hues and develop a lively interplay of colours. A glimmer of pale pink arises from the surface of the floor to fill the spacious hall and, depending on the time of day, evocative of the ambiance of dawn or sunset in the wild. The manner in which the panels are connected horizontally also creates a sense of movement from one to the next, prompting the eye to follow suit. The panels become quasi energy fields, generating an exchange of energy, not only across them, but also in the vertical, between the interior dimensions and the floor on which they lie flat. By linking one of these copper panels to the walls, the artist activates the whole space, just as the few panels placed upright effect an additional spatial presence with respect to the ceiling.

It is not absolutely necessary to know that these copper panels are circuit boards. The particular properties of copper as a conductive material were first exploited artistically by Joseph Beuys. The symbolic sign of a flowing current of energy is introduced by Nicola Schrudde in the signet of a coil in the small video projection, which lights up over the field, flickering at times. A current flowing through a coil generates an electromagnetic field, which in turn induces an electric field and so on. The energy current produced by electromagnetism flows in nature as well as in our technical appliances, in every mobile phone, and is essential for our life on this planet. At the same time, the graphic symbol of the coil is nothing other than a line, progressing in a particular rhythmic spiral. It is a linear movement that has something in common with writing or drawing.

Such wavy linear structures can in turn be identified on the surfaces of the 31 clay sculptures distributed around the hall. Clay is an age-old sculptor's material. It was already used by the first humans. Like them, Nicola Schrudde works with her hands, inscribing the creative

person into the object with the tracks left in the surfaces. The clay entities have something very archaic about them, an aura redolent of human origins, in stark contrast to the smooth industrial copper sheets. Unlike copper, clay is an insulator through which no current can flow. Fuses used to be made of clay. Each one of the sculptures quietly asserts its presence at its own particular location. They resemble each other, giving rise to distinctive groups or families, and yet are each very individually formed.

As solitaires jutting out of the landscape, each imparts its own aura. At the same time, they appear frail and vulnerable. The unglazed and porous material has an air of fragility and defencelessness. Light is captured on the multifarious creased surfaces with their loops and spirals, so that the contours, which are already fluctuating, seem about to disappear in a lively interplay of light and shadow. This effect is enhanced by the application of colour. Some are sprayed with diluted tempera paint in soft pastel hues, their transparency offering a responsive surface for the incident light. Once more, Monet and the loosely-executed dashes of colour in his waterlily paintings come to mind. Other sculptures are treated with metallic paints that reflect the light, transforming them into something surreal and immaterial, notwithstanding their magnificent opulence.

The objects appear light, almost hovering, although the weight they bring to bear on the floor is in fact considerable. Along with the surface-activating colour scheme, the shape, which often tapers down towards the floor suggesting a gravity-defying dynamic, contributes to this impact. Some resemble meteorites or other rocks, while many others seem more like buds or capsules from which something might be about to break forth. One also thinks of the calcium carbonate exoskeletons of living organisms such as corals or other sea creatures. Or could they even be the fossilized remains of extinct types of vegetation?

Nicola Schrudde's landscape, through which the viewer can wander, introduces qualities with which we are familiar from painting into the space, and thus into the immediate vicinity of the viewers. Nonetheless, this installation remains a protected zone removed from everyday experience. It appears real and yet shifted towards the impalpable by its radiant beauty. We immerse ourselves in it as if in a picture that ties in with our own images, memories and emotions, while telling us a story. Our knowledge and our encounters with art, nature and technology become inextricably associated with each other thereby.

A distinction between nature and culture has long become obsolete. Nature is us and everything we are surrounded by. Nature is subject and object at one and the same time. The boundaries between the synthetic and the organic, the manmade and the natural, are suspended, just as the age-old antagonism between painting and sculpture. The result is a Gesamtkunstwerk with the human as the point of reference, making landscape comprehensible as a symbol of all these combined forces.

Opening speech at the exhibition
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