

Schwarzwasser or: desire and structure

Black is the favourite colour of Stefan Thiel, black as a mirror image and partner of white defines his work. Cut out of dark paper, his silhouettes unshell themselves in big, dark curvatures to give space for the light of the white parts and to frame them. In a dull shade of black the parts cut out deliquesce to a picture that calls up memories – memories of a world untouched by mankind that is able to evolve its natural power. Stefan Thiel photographs his places of longing: From the Schlachtensee to the Stechlinsee, from the shores of the Berlin river Spree to the Schwarzwasser in Erzgebirge. The artist manages to find seemingly untapped landscapes by his photographic gaze, although little biotopes within the city can become these motives, too.

How far his desire reaches is not to be known by the contemplator – we are only able to follow him as far as he allows us to do: to their effigy. In no case he shows us the colourfulness of nature, neither flowers nor leaves nor branches can develop their natural essence – although they are not meant to do so. Under his hands nature becomes pure form. Only in our memories we think to see natural places, supported by the titles of his works that tell us the origin of the images. But what we really perceive is something absolutely different. We only recognise structures in their radical abstraction. We see how black and white surfaces correspond to each other, we may retrace lines that clash and if we want to, we may solely appreciate the sophistication of the artist's non-representational world. Stefan Thiel succeeds to return to the origin of painting without ever touching a brush. He researches the relations between surfaces and radicalises his findings. Merely black and white converge and generate a tension that leads directly to the top of modernity. Like this he frees the *Cut outs* from the snugness of Biedermeier period and demonstrate, what it may imply to create landscape art today. Unbound by the history, Stefan Thiel opens worlds that generate their power out of two principles: temper and structure.

Jan Maruhn, August 2013

Gabinetto Segreto – Erotic silhouette cuts by Stefan Thiel at Salon 2.

Who would have thought that a handcraft tradition that lasted for two entire art historical periods (Neoclassicism and Romanticism) could have been renewed today, incorporating some provocative potential?

The Berlin based artist Stefan Thiel reinterprets the silhouette cut, a technique especially used during the Biedermeier period for a bourgeois audience. Thiel's interpretations free the silhouettes from the outmoded representational system, which back then framed all development rigidly.

The series *100 Berlin Based Men* shows proud men dropping their trousers unhesitatingly for the artist. Thiel's paper cuts only show indirect allusions to the virile attributes of man whereas the pose of undressing invites the spectator to appreciate many details: Is it a young and strapping athlete or a mature man? Stefan Thiel's virtuosity becomes apparent when we consider the particular tension between smooth or hairy bodies and the trousers unfolding under the knees, showing accessories like the belt, to the audience. He creates these works, together with the photo sessions to prepare the motifs, as a compliment to his other paper cut series. Via these pieces the artist presents himself as a hunter and gatherer, collecting the gay and straight men that are ready to profile like in an *album amicorum*. Thiel uses social media such as *facebook* for inspiration, where a new mode of coded representation developed itself by willingly posing people, profiling themselves by their pictures in public.

The group of works is unambiguous concerning the men playing with themselves, the sex toys and other men – but simultaneously it is not compromising the models. The black outlines shelter and give anonymity to those individuals depicted. This mask of the technique follows precisely the form of the men but protects them from appropriation. It fires the protagonist's and the spectator's imagination: everybody is a star...

Enriching the contrast Thiel adds designer furniture, that, depending on style or time, thwart or affirm interaction with his cuts. These objects further stand for the new and modern man. *Wandervogel* and *Bauhaus* are not that far away from each other. Today's highly visible attitude towards body sculpting is intensified discreetly and simultaneously the classic chair is pointed out as representing the new bourgeois highbrow whose *Wassily-Chair* of Breuer or the *Ant-Chair* of Arne Jacobsen have not been thought of as being mere accessory for a tête-à-tête in the first place.

In his installation *Gabinetto Segreto* the artist combines both groups of works, the *100 Berlin Based Men* and the erotic *paper cuts*, together with some of these chairs that were part of the setting during his photo sessions.

Semjon H. N. Semjon, July 2013