

Navigation Through the Unconscious. The Art of Christiane Haase

The scenery couldn't be more humorous and irritating: In a conventional hardware store the consumer discovers colourful, apparently industrially produced household items in typical packaging. But even after examining these products very carefully, their purpose is still unknown: "In addition to the elegant, designer-type presentation, the objects were integrated into the hardware store's world of products during the one-day event "Alien Tools goes Public". During recordings with the customers, we developed conversations about associations and functions, which – according to where one and the same object was placed among different product areas – were very different," as the creator Christiane Haase observed.

The artist had actually initiated the situation and had chosen it as an important part of her artistic concept: In the middle of an everyday, routine event, the artist implants surreal objects that evoke the impression of being useful, but which in the end are purely fantasy objects and cause confusion. "Alien Tools – Implements for Unknown Tasks" is the title Christiane Haase gave this series of useful objects made in the years 2001-2004, which does not designate any particular activity, but rather stimulates associations, suspicions and speculations. In the enclosed "Function-search-directions" she suggests possible uses of the Alien Tools, but in the end the 'art user' is summoned to explore the spectrum of the 'unknown tasks' on his own: "The main emphasis was my attempt to create objects that suggest a function without really having one. Moreover, in contrast to conventional exhibition pieces, the observer was supposed to become actively involved with the objects (...)", notes the artist.

This sort of exchange between object and observer is reminiscent of André Masson, even though the French artist of the classic avant-garde used drawings as his means of expression. Already in 1923, Masson used his method, called 'écriture automatique,' to plead for uncontrolled drawing that 'originates in the unconscious' (Masson). Masson went into a sort of 'trance' and then let the drawing pen glide over the paper. The result is pure gestures, rhythms or 'smears', as the artist calls it. In the course of this artistic gesture, a 'motif' results automatically. Stopping to reflect is not desired. Masson describes the trance, which is the important prerequisite for the 'écriture automatique' as a sort of meditation that is comparable with the self-forgotten play of a child: accordingly, the child not only plays with his toys, but also receives unexpected impulses from the object. In this sense, activity and passivity are divided equally on both sides.

The formation of Alien Tools evolved in a similar design process, which also tied in drawing, as Christiane Haase explains: "But as I already mentioned, it was the first moment of total non-understanding, the amazement about the form and the colour as well as the speculations about the use that fascinated me the most. Once these questions had been clarified, they lost their wonder. The objects were no longer magical. In order to preserve this moment, I began to design strange tools that were consciously conceived to serve *no* concrete purpose, but were supposed to look as though they did. I never had a finished design in mind. It evolved during my drawing. My hand drew lines on the paper, and I tried to recognise something, to give them some direction, to draw something that looked as though it could exist as a real object, as though it could be something, a well-rounded thing. This way more and more drawings emerged that began to form their own little world."

The participatory content of Christiane Haase's works is unmistakable, whereby she resorts to her own experiences here, as she writes: "The experience I had in Japan of being foreign, for example the incapability to conclusively identify or classify objects or behaviour and my special role as a foreigner is what I developed into many designs for objects that swing back and forth like hybrids between living beings and objects (...). Fragment pieces of the most diverse forms awaken different associations, but finally keep themselves being definitively clarified and classified." The fascination remains intact until the phenomenon or the event is disenchanting by language. With her sculptures, the artist always emphasizes the area before language, that is, she keeps her objects in the reception stages of affect and association and prevents an aesthetic bridge to the sphere of statement and meaning. This basic principle is not only apparent in *Alien Tools*, but also in later works such as 'Parasites' and 'Loss of Control'. The conceptual successors of *Alien Tools* could be strange forms that stubbornly stick to objects, or which spread out throughout space. 'Parasites' seem to spread uncontrollably, whereas nature doesn't necessarily consider this type of occupation as negative, as far as one can speak of nature as a subject capable of making decisions. In our observation we feel discomfort, fear and even aversion when we come across such proliferation, whereby we often evaluate the scenery, next to physiological aspects, from the civilised perspective: hygienic standards we were taught, reflective knowledge about possible life-threatening consequences of such parasitic behaviour, and finally, the socially and ethically motivated moral, that the fundamental freedom of others is sacred. This civilised perspective goes along with forms of repression or control of desire that enable a social community to survive. Christiane Haase touches exactly this discrepancy between conscious and unconscious with her objects in that she refers to the sphere of the unconscious by way of reception control and lets them remain a stable entity. The resolution of the discomfort, which would be possible by interpretation, that is by the artist's aesthetic instructions enabling the recognition of causalities and the possibility of labelling with language, is fully lacking. Christiane Haase brings out this very discrepancy in works like 'Verstrickt' ('Entangled'), when the fluctuation between the metaphoric and factual is shown with a sense of humour. Many knitted sweaters in different colours were connected into chains, so that they dominated the room in the end. Here she stands in the tradition of genre painting, which for example illustrates patriotic or everyday phrases in paintings. In contrast to her art historical predecessors, Christiane Haase's works have no aspirations to set norms or values, but rather – by their grotesque effect – make the aesthetic experiences profane, which are accepted in their exclusivity for the most part without critique. Beyond that, this work unfolds an ambivalent effect, as the artist intended: "At first it seems that my works are very often cheerful and colourful, but upon closer observation, the changed function works against that impression. Certain uncanny or uncomfortable moments are also present in many of my works. In fact, that already begins with the pullover-wall 'Verstrickt', that looks like a decorative, colourful wall piece at first glance, but the title and the notion of being held and imprisoned in a screen is already then not so cheerful."

Sigmund Freud, to whom Christiane Haase refers in terms of the uncanny, was also confronted with the dilemma of how to speak about the unconscious when he was involved with dream interpretation. Remembering pictures and scenes of a dream already includes the danger of a new order in this stage of cognition, so that the authentic and direct parts of a dream formation with all its absurdities would already lose

intensity. Even the assumption of such a change potential would put the rest of the interpretation in question. With the fundamental meaning of this potential danger in mind – after all this aspect is at the beginning of the dream interpretation – the multi-dimensional nature and the ambiguity of imagined dream-scenarios could become doubtful. The French surrealists raised this point of criticism when they met Freud and exchanged ideas. The surrealists' criticism of civilisation, which they not only visualized in the most varied of nuances, turns and directions in their works, but which they also posed to the observer as permanent problems to solve related to experience and thought, can only unfold its effectiveness in the continuation of its riddles. Any offer to give a securely accessible interpretation of the surrealists' aesthetic form would play into the hands of just the rationality of our civilisation being criticised.

Another side of the of the artistic criticism of civilisation with a psychoanalytical-anthropological slant consults the sphere of the suppression of desire as its field of practice: Arnulf Rainer undertook diverse experiments on himself in the 1960's to escape the rule of civilisation by reaching an energetic, desire-free condition and attempted to translate it into a picture without using the cultural tool of a brush and without any academic rules. Hermann Nitsch organized group happenings, which – in the hybrid form of a worship service, a folk festival and a medicine man ritual – were to provoke spontaneous reactions in order to be able to shed the shackles of civilised humanity at least for a moment in the condition of lost control. In contrast to these positions, which deliver art into a non-art event (ritual, worship service) to the point of being unrecognisable, Christiane Haase emphasises the art sphere as an exclusive terrain in relationship to society. In the midst of this exterritorial sphere, she stimulates experiences that, although they originate in the subconscious, illustrate an almost anthropological collection of common characteristics: discomfort, fears, undivided joy, fascination, etc. This aspect becomes visible in the artists' newest statues. The observer is confronted with large-sized objects, which – far away from an academic art ideal – seem to be fatally threatening in their aggressive expression, since the forms open up a broad spectrum of negative associations: maggots, attack, morbidity, proliferation, etc. In the same breath, the artist foils the aesthetic, actually soothing perception of art. In this sense, we can also speak - according to the art theorist John Dewey – of an inseparable mesh of two worlds of experience: daily experience and aesthetic experience. For the most part, the observer experiences them separately and in the course of his reflective perception, must connect them together with great effort. Christine Haase connects both types of experience in her works and thus expresses a utopian moment of union that art considers a genuine component of society.

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