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Preface artist-monograph Wilhelm Drach

The works of art by Wilhelm Drach are enlightenment and mystery at the same time. The familiar is explained and at the same time rejected again into its existential concealment. The pictures are therefore not only a joy to the eye, but also reflections on a theme and the art of painting with all its shadings and traditions. The critical observer, as well as the knowledgeable, understand the pictures as offers and an invitation to participate. The unfinished work, with all its precision and a powerful non finito, allows the viewer to insert himself, who, in the spirit of *opera aperta*, the open work of art by Umberto Eco (essay of the same name, 1962), quickly understands himself as part of the picture, a picture in which he participates, because the work of art does not impose any rules, but carries within itself the openness to think.

The *œuvre* of Drach is permeated by complexity, diversity, contradictions without any legalities of its own. For the pictures are neither abstract nor illustrative, they do not meticulously conform to the reality of a pictorial object outside the picture. The artist's painting is the expression of a humane, reflective existence without theoretical or stylistic rules which, as regulations of the artistic imagination, would cause restrictions. The heads, landscapes, and the many pictures of women are depicted in direct frontality, the viewer finding it difficult to regain his own distance. This frontality is at the same time the overcoming of the picture's subject and its own stimulating quality and originality as an emphasis on subjective personal expression and appropriation of the surrounding world. The immediacy prevents the so-called ideal aesthetic distance, which the viewer seeks out as his or her own point of rest. The pictures change with the different distances, the near and far become brothers of one and the same picture, which triggers these tensions in the mind of the viewer. The energies of a picture are too great to be interpreted with an explanation.

The pictures are produced in a slow process, with ever new considerations that are incorporated into the picture (see the text by Clara Kaufmann). The non finito, which was transmitted by Michelangelo for economic reasons, and developed by Rodin into an essential aesthetic characteristic, is played out perfectly by Drach, who is always surprised by the many possibilities of a picture through minimal changes. At the same time, he is aware of the difficulty of finding the only correct point in time at which the individual work achieves the maximum effect, that is, when it is finished. Completion becomes a struggle with himself and the picture and the picture with himself, as it were, which has accompanied the artist since the early 1980s (see the text by Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer on the pictures from 2000–2001).

Drach does not work according to a simple system or a dominant theory. He works hard on each picture by slowly painting, thinking, continuing to paint, etc. He combines directness with complexity, immediacy with experience, spontaneity with conceptual structures, invention (*invenit*) with repetition (*incisit*), experiences with new classifications. The viewer experiences an exciting visual new order of the world.

The artist's themes – heads, landscapes, and, above all, depictions of women – have been known in the art history of almost all countries and continents for thousands of years and have repeatedly come into the focus of the visual arts. Of course, Drach no longer lives in the bonds of the Middle Ages, his themes are no longer iconographically bound. They are free expressions on old themes. Therefore, it is not so much about the what but the how of his painting.

Drach dedicates his work (*Woman-Abstraction-Landscape*) to the genuine nature of wholeness. Nature as a landscape becomes a projection of power, synergies, inner and at the same time outer peace in the sense of beauty and security as a picturesque, invented construction in world areas where man has increasingly intervened destructively through wars, climate change, persecution, contempt for women, and destruction, etc. over the last 120 years. In the photo, we see the thinking, smoking painter who, in his painterly self-awareness, constantly re-experiences the normative rules of bourgeois society itself in order to question them artistically.

The value of art is subject to the current evaluations of a society that recognizes only one value, the economic one. Drach leaves this mode of "unambiguousness" behind. His paintings speak of wealth and not of the unification of the world (Thomas Bauer, *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt/ The Mode of Unambiguousness*,

Stuttgart 2018). Each picture testifies to an imaginative wealth that is virtually inexhaustible and which the artist emphasizes in different ways again and again. Drach avoids the loss of ambiguity and diversity. Therefore, the pictures can be seen as thought-provoking, reflective painting – not as *l'art pour l'art*, but also not without their knowledge – as political reflections on the image of man in the artistic artefact, as painting, not as photography with the character of a depiction. Thoughtfulness is built into every painting. They are building blocks of a vehement aesthetic empathy of an experienced life and of seen thoughtfulness, which constantly expands the image as image as experience. The process of the images is intensified into the future. They are not embedded in an intellectually contaminated system in response to a socio-cultural thesis but are documents of personal freedom. Drach sees his art as art, as works of art that grow into the future as a cosmos of their own and can provide new answers. This is one of the reasons why the paintings are not direct political reflections on the present but designed as sustainable visions.

Therefore, Drach can playfully show the change of stylistic emotions, the change of themes, the reflections on painting as art, the changing use of artistic means, the change between the invention of images and one's own artistic life and the *vita* of an artist in search of himself and the novelty of art with its endless traditional guidelines. For the questioner, art becomes a parallel action, as Robert Musil so aptly puts it in *The Man Without Qualities*: Parallel action as an answer to the given world, the projection of which also requires other than superficial, retinal experiences if one wants to understand the world.

Drach sees question and answer in art. It is a search for and questioning of art and the artist and at the same time the visualized answer to existential questions of one's own physical and emotional existence. This could mean that Drach uses his alter ego as a projection. But this attachment to vanity is not evident in the paintings, the artist himself does not appear in the paintings. The painting is not auto-psychic, as is often seen in art (e.g. Schiele, de Kooning, Rainer, Lüpertz, Baselitz, etc.). The works are options of his own life experiences, which Drach lets become pictures without sexist overtones so that in each picture a large authenticity is to be felt. This *œuvre* was created beyond market conditions, a position that has become increasingly rare today. That is why it makes no compromises, does not raise false hopes. Instead, however, we see directness, truth, authenticity, in other words, the honesty that distinguishes true art in dealing with the world.