

Open-ended – Or the Attempt to Become a Loop

Sketch for a text on the artistic methods of Sabine Bokelberg

Remain in constant flux. Open-ended. In this way keeping art, keeping painting dynamic for oneself and the viewer. Experiment. Alienate relentlessly. Uncover extremes. Surprise yourself. Establish stability in instability. Eradicate boundaries. Liquefy the self, liquefy authorship?

One picture already anticipates the next:

The artist develops something new or alternative from earlier pictures, she integrates more, and different, motifs or techniques, evolves them, reworks them, transfers them into another style or medium only to break them down and undermine them again later.

In this process nothing is final or foreclosed: light will become darker; the crude, the heavy, 'bad taste' will appear on top of the delicate, the lyrical, the faint; colours, suggestions of colour, are erased with dense white, and flat areas encounter scrawled gestures or sprayed lines, grids, dots.

High and low: hand-made is combined with the digitalized and printed. Peeled pieces of masking tape provide an insight into deeper layers of the picture or remain as part of the work, in the same way that puzzling embellishments appear as traces whose origins remain open. In doing so materials are challenged and related to each other in various ways. Thus primer (gesso) can, for example, serve as paint or as a finishing layer. Or, it nullifies the difference between the information in a printed picture and the abstraction of painterly gestures.

Is it possible to compare Sabine Bokelberg's work – in which the temporal singularity of the individual picture is dissolved in an evolving narrative – with a serial story or a serial novel, developed over a long period of time, from here to there, step by step, without excluding retrospection?

Each individual work is essentially already a serial story told with contentious multiplicity. Although it might not be possible to flick through the images like one would with a book, a catalogue of work, or even different levels that are physically separated from each other, the viewer can (and should) understand the way in which their colour/material sequences have been applied and conceptualised. But perhaps 'conceptualised' is already saying too much. Is each distinct image, each chapter, not about a bold combination, about a "visual stumbling"¹ between layers, and an unpredictable transition from field to field?

We could ask ourselves to what extent, following this logic, future pictures are always already there, present, considered. Do they already exist as ideas? Are they already in the air? Have they already started appearing through the transparent layers of older works?

Dostoyevsky, for instance, always conceptualised individual chapters of his serial literature in advance (e.g. Crime and Punishment, 12 chapters, 1866), but only wrote them incrementally.²

Since everything takes the form of sequences and processes in Bokelberg's work, there are no hierarchies: paintings and works on paper, which in turn are continuations, or the sum, of different modes of production, exist on the same level. And subsequently each of the chapters is also always an original. There are no editions and nothing is copied identically. Every 'piece' is part of the action, either as a subplot or as the central theme.

¹ See: "Watch your step! Tiger ahead! On visual stumbling in Sabine Bokelberg's work", Marie von Heyl, 2014

² See the German entry on "Feuilletonroman", Wikipedia, URL: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feuilletonroman>, (status 01.03.2015)

Resultantly there is no single series that can be teased out, although it is tempting to see the works in this way, particularly when certain features clearly resemble each other. This is also true of the majority of the newest pieces on HDF board, which are all the same size.

In such a case, a more detailed look at the method of naming the work can be helpful:

After the obligatory “o.T.” (‘Untitled’) there is always a hashtag symbol as well as a four-part combination of letters (sometimes upper case, sometimes lower) and occasionally there are also numbers: an intriguingly individual and contemporary method of devising titles that Bokelberg determines by using a password generator. If a congruence between titles appears, in terms of the letters, for example, this can suggest that the pictures were made at a similar time point and are inherently related, perhaps due to dominant characteristics or picture size.

Returning to serial stories, the term ‘cliffhanger’ should not be overlooked, the idea of a build up of suspense which – to hold the reader’s attention – is only dissipated in the next chapter. While looking at Sabine Bokelberg’s images one is frequently confronted with long, sometimes twisted or crumpled tape, often glued on and occasionally also ripped off again so that only negative imprints remain. Could this also be read as a type of ‘cliffhanger’? In an interview, the artist described her motif of the open curve in her pictures, and the materiality of the tape that pushes it to its limits, as an “attempt to become a loop”.

Loopings into the past or loopings into the future, then, consistently toying with the possibility of eventually closing – but never actually becoming a permanently fixed knot

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