

Andreas Neufert on Jeffrey T Y Lee's drawing

*first glance*

I have never yet succeeded in entering an art fair without this investigative feeling of having to discover more about the *case*, of needing to collect just a few more clues about the life of the person I myself would like to be. During this mental and physical search the feeling accompanies me, lying hiding behind every work which appeals to me from behind, which insists that I turn around, because invisible tentacles reach out for it and – in the midst of the swirl and turmoil of the moment – strap me tightly to the here and now. In truth I am much more interested in this physical longing, this obscure, unwilling extension of myself, than in the work which oppresses me like an altar, which masterfully stands before me, a *fait accompli*. Those who consider the actual artwork merely a necessary inducement, a process which unfolds independently - like a film in the head of a hastily passing solipsist - is seriously mistaken about the challenge and complexity a work must possess before it can participate in this strange exchange of imponderables.

I must confess that I suffer from a Rothko or, even better, an Ad Reinhard complex. Black pictures that even in passing let you know that they are not just black provoke in me a kind of spiritual pull, a sort of memory bubble that makes itself noticeable like a slowly inflating balloon somewhere at the back of my head. I could also describe it as previously unknown niche in space and time, suddenly unfolding. Already, we are in close proximity to the metaphor of the unentered room, its decades of accumulated shadow, its keys already misplaced by some distant ancestor. My head is a huge old and only partially inhabitable family. At one of these fairs, passing Jeffrey's large black drawing for the first time, I had even without looking closely the vague notion of just such a niche, bubble, or one could even say, of such a chamber in my head. Not unlike one of those ghost simulating eidetic perception images used by Wolfgang Paalen and David Smith in the Thirties and. From booth to booth – feeling as if walking through a stalactite cave by candlelight. I doubled back at the next booth, passed the stand again at a slightly slower pace. At first I saw no more than a translucent curtain with frayed edge. No window, niche, bubble. Or chamber. Only black. I stopped, came closer, walked slowly up and down, respecting the one meter distance Rothko demanded and still saw nothing but a cloth-like, tightly drawn, all-encompassing line structure cross-hatching the entire picture plane. Then all of a sudden my breath seemed mirrored in the drawing. The surface rose and fell as if a gust of wind had swept through it. Immediately after, I stood rooted to the ground, my eyes close to the glass like a child in front of a shop window. What a rare surprise when, taking a closer look, the first impression becomes *real* before your eyes for a second time: one suspects oneself to be the victim of some mania, some duplication of synaptic processes. The picture renders you both witness to and participant of your own perception. Not only that – it takes the initiative as if it knew something about me... How, damn it, can this picture know me? How could it know my weak point? My attraction to curiosity cabinets? Every image is of course a view into a room outside time. Even a cubist Picasso, who did not allow the picture to grow even a millimetre beyond the canvas, couldn't hinder this angle of vision. But here?

A few explanatory words from the gallery director sufficed to clarify this enabling process whereby a participant in pictures achieves a completely unexpected access to historic reality. Before me, a stately room with a coffered ceiling, pilaster motives covering the walls, parquet floor, and filled to

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the brim with cultural remnants of an epoch locked away for four decades: toppled Baroque arm chairs, stuffed parrots, demolished furniture and Napoleonic busts. The artist had seen a newspaper photograph of a Weimar Baroque chamber sealed after the war, and opened only when the Wall had fallen. He had drawn this moment of unclosing and the *first* glance of the room precisely *as* a first glance, that now, time and again, will continue to disclose itself to me as exactly that, a first glance. This because I had already come to the decision to take the picture home – to be the first! Again and again I would be able to stand in front of it asking myself: was I the first to cast my eyes over this drawing on this first day of the fair, into a room that I had not been the first to see, because space and time had contrived for me to be elsewhere? – or was it the drawing that had first opened something within me, into which only I could – or would want to – take the first look? Did this time, this movement exist at all? Was it more or less possible? Entities in specific configurations, a thousand folded and unfolded dimensions that I would – like everyone else before of this picture – arrange into a certain order. Would this then in turn leave me standing, the first of this new constellation which in fact belonged only to me?

As I collected the drawing on the last day of the fair – it had in the meantime caused whole clusters of visitors to gather in front of it – I had the impression that with each act of examination the whole universe would dislodge anew from the category of time and split up into multiple variants of itself. Once I reached home it was alarming how this unique effect on my thoughts magnified. Confusion increased. Nonsense and profundity fearlessly encountered. Time ran backwards, and I suddenly feared that it might actually collapse back upon itself, on a Judgement Day. The fine black lines now almost appeared as diagrams investigating the strange impacts of quantum gravity, foreseeing its unforeseen effects. A system for the thousands and thousands of curved dimensions this world would once require to save at least those four in which I had already lost my bearings. Finally I looked around, saw the furniture, the pictures, the walls surrounding me in my apartment; everything stood in its place. Nothing stirred. I contemplated what kind of a “culture of fear” we live in. Who was this culture? Me?

Andreas Neufert, Berlin, Rome, October 2006

Translation: Eva Wilson