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FROM AREA TO LINE TO POINT ...

Should we not strictly separate and differentiate the graphical point and line from the so-called pictorial forms in order to gain a closer understanding of the essence of point and line, so we do justice to the arcanum of graphical minimalism? Attempts to make such distinctions have constantly been made ever since G. Vasari established the modern concept of *disegno* and basically emancipated the graphical from pictorial skill when he emphasised drawing talent in some of his biographies of renaissance artists. Heinrich Wölfflin, for example, distinguishes between the pictorial and the graphical in the famous conceptual pairs he devised to describe formal characteristics of artistic expression – and the issue was also taken up by Paul Klee and W. Kandinsky in their reflections (such as Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane*). If one pursues these considerations of art theory, one becomes increasingly aware of the intrinsic ambivalence between the graphical and the pictorial. On the one hand, one appears to feel the essential difference which defines the autonomy and specific aesthetic and formal qualities of the two modes of expression. Yet on the other, it is clearly extremely difficult to separate the graphical from the pictorial – in pictures and drawings they appear to be indistinguishably interwoven and transformed into each other. Coloured areas and limiting and localising lines which assign figurative structures to colour spaces that tend to push into the amorphous appear necessary to correspond to and be dependent on each other by complementing each other.

Whether they consist of linework (contours, hatching, straight, bent, broken or solid strokes), which form the colour spaces and give them their shape or whether, conversely, it is the coloured spaces which appear to give linework of whatever kind its content – they mostly operate as necessary parts of a whole. But precisely because both phenomena fulfil a certain mutual function for the other (at least from the point of view which has just been described), they also lose their autonomous qualities. Only when we refer both poles refer to their respective extreme (e.g. in the form of the purely pictorial as expressed in the abstract paintings of a Mark Rothko), does the particularity of each one become tangible in the sense of a completely liberated aesthetic quality. An almost perfect example of this liberation of the linear and the graphic from painting, or rather from figurative and representational painting can be seen in the way Renate Krammer's artistic expression has developed over the course of time. In contrast to the usual forms of perception and representation which shape our everyday experiences in a world objectified into the representational, artistic expression first has to emancipate itself in order to discover the fascination of the graphical. The pictorial defines the area which as we have seen always represents the principle element for both modalities of expression, as a homogenous unit, but stroke and line tear up this homogeneity in the truest sense of the word – for a fault line and an empty space also open up between each line, and this underlays the graphic ductus with a paradoxical form of the undetermined, with creative vagueness and openness. In contrast to the totality of painting which is always tempted to fill out the available area for our eye – as if the background of the picture were always something negative, incomplete and in need of supplementation – the graphic ductus corresponds far more to the fragmentary.

Even if areas are primarily created by lines, by gestures of drawing, they still need the imagination⁵ of the viewer to supplement them – this is precisely one of the things which characterises the specific quality of the graphical. The line is eo ipso an abstraction, an idealisation and in this sense it also addresses our powers of abstraction and of the imagination: As viewers we see what is not there in the picture (!), i.e. our imagination sees what the eye does not see because it is only present in the empty spaces between the linear forms. This fascinating mechanism of the graphical, which the pictorial and colour, in particular, cannot fulfil because they primarily satisfy sensual seeing, manifests itself in works which completely dispense with identifiable objects – and yet we see apparently spatial objects, even though in reality they consist only of transposed, compressed and/or curtailed strokes. In order to perceive the truth and therefore the non-figurative, i.e. the abstractness of these graphic line structures we have to work counter to the automated supplementation that occurs in our imagination here: We see space (and objects, too) where they don't exist and first have to learn to disregard this impression of space in order to pay appropriate attention to what is visibly there: An almost meditative seriality of lines which follow each other in all kinds of different strokes, which constantly draw closer to the previous line and yet are never the same or identical. Thousands of repeated strokes and lines which are never the same, which always start afresh to find a new way and course and end once more – as the start of the next.

The Augenhöhe (Eye-level) group of works shows how the free spaces of our imagination enlarge and above all our imagination is captured the greater the reduction there is to the elementary. Irrespective of the social critique evident in the message of this work, the reduction of the faces to their pairs of eyes through veiling in the form of a horizontal thread pattern is significant at a formal level. It is not just that the (graphic) stroke technique materialises here in cotton threads. The associative impulse to present the (invisible) faces without the veils, i.e. to visualise the invisible through the powers of the imagination, is also realised here in accordance with the specific quality of the graphical. Even though they are barely recognisable, the outlines of faces and skin colours actually shimmer through the gaps in the threads – as if to evoke the visibility of the invisible.

Line structures can condense, dissolve, contract or lose themselves as it were – and become mere points, black and white points which – and this is what the eye of our imagination wants us to see – link again to figurative sequences, to gestalts, to coherent configurations, as if an invisible line, a transparent stroke existed between them. The random constellations of points in GO almost offer an introduction into Euclidean geometry as Euclid described it in his work: *Elementa*. In an almost unsettling minimalism of figurative design Renate Krammer compels the viewer to perceive primeval graphic elements which people rarely think about, let alone perceive as a picture. But if an aspect of art is to reside in raising the viewer's awareness of what has not been perceived, or has been overlooked or unheeded, then this above all is what the extremely reductionist visual forms manage to achieve: the viewer is able to experience fundamentally creative and artistic categories.

If points can condense themselves into lines and areas, lines can equally develop into swarms – which begs the analogy to swarming phenomena in nature. The graphic ductus enables structures such as a formation of birds in flight to be depicted as social group behaviour, hardwired as it were into the genes of the

creatures, in an abstracting form which is all the more concise and succinct for being so. A further significant fact in this regard is that the more the visual motifs (in their representational, object form) dissolve in the logic of linear structuring into abstract, barely recognisable motifs, the clearer the structural skeleton emerges. The more Renate Krammer pursues her ability to render reduction and abstraction in the phenomenon of the line, the more convincingly the subjects of her images become purely aesthetic-artistic forms, and the more they lead viewers to focus their attention more on frequently disregarded but all the more fundamental phenomena of aesthetic perception.

In the group Signs her thematic starting point also corresponds to this abstractive reduction. On the one hand she proceeds from the constantly questioned relationship between everyday life and art, while on the other she specifies this theme using the pictographic code which has ultimately become omniscient and therefore commonplace in the age of computer technology. As everyone knows, it is not just public space but above all the so-called user interfaces in our world of digital communications which are littered with pictograms – above all, in order to enable those who in actual fact are digitally illiterate because they (want to) have nothing to do with program codes in order to have a go at a few manipulations (applications). Behind these pictograms lies the fundamental idea that we can convey information and meanings without the need for recourse to language – in a self-explanatory way, as it were. The circumstance that only a few facts are displayed in a clear iconic code is something that everyone can experience for themselves if they wished to decode these inflationary computer icons without having any additional reference to their meaning. One way of explaining this runs analogously to the essence of the line. Pictograms, too, are on the one hand reductions of a concrete depiction, accurate in very detail, of the supposedly essential, but on the other they become all the more abstract and hence more ambiguous (or polyvalent) the more reduced they are. In the first instance, however, Krammer is interested in how quickly the simplest pictographic forms and signs begin to determine and regulate the everyday world of communication. At the same time she is also interested in the extent to which these signs drift down into a subconscious state of non-perception so that they are no longer appreciated as such at all, at least not in their specific intrinsic quality. The more these graphic elements become focal centres in the communications network the less they are taken notice of. In her copper wire textures which depict, as it were, the signal noise of our everyday life, we find engraved a few typical icons (such as Home, Lock etc.) – formally determined purely and simply through an even starker reduction of the linear structure. Here we notice that even a slight difference is completely decisive. Information is a difference that makes a difference, in the words of G. Bateson's definition. And here the difference between two linear, organising structures suffices to give a completely ignored sign a new meaning.

Her work, which appears almost meditative at times, enables these disregarded icons to assume a deliberately perceived form, i.e. they turn into a design phenomenon. The extent to which her reductive linearization can lead to an alienation of seemingly familiar perception is indicated by the graphic sheets on which she reconstructs the computer icon of the revolving globe with a choice of several views but in a strictly horizontal linear design. The apparently familiar geography of the world appears distorted and alien – but in this way it is once again perceived with consciousness and deliberation!

