

“Nulla dies sine Linia—Not a day without a line.”¹

Paul Klee

This phrase from Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*, in which the Roman scholar describes an episode involving Apelles and Protogenes, was noted down by Paul Klee in 1938 in his catalogue of works below a drawing with the work number 365. No other phrase could better describe the artistic practice of Renate Krammer. For the past 20 years, the line has provided the formal and contentual core of her oeuvre, the basic idea and *primum movens* behind an endless multitude of compositional variations. It is the expression of a freehand movement on the sheet of paper performed according to parameters that are conceived by the artist in advance. And the ability to ignore these parameters if other, more interesting, ideas emerge during the production of the work is another aspect of Krammer’s process-oriented activity.

Klee developed his line theory between 1918 and 1927, before adding a few further aspects in subsequent years. He credits the line with expression, dynamics, and psyche. Leonardo also extensively explored the subject of the line but did so differently, in the spirit of the Renaissance idea of “disegno”: as plan, intention, and design. He recognized that the line had the highly-complex capacity to construct bodies and volumes but disputed whether it existed in nature and, hence, whether it had any role to play in pictorial representation. According to Leonardo, we don’t appreciate nature in terms of lines but, rather, perceive a landscape in varying degrees of sharpness—from the fine detail of the immediate surroundings to the far distance, of which we are only hazily aware. Hence, things should appear in “sfumato,” as a series of interwoven tones. Similar skepticism towards the line is expressed by Pater Zea in Daniel Kehlmann’s novel *Measuring the World*, when he tells the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt about the attempt to determine the length of the equator. “To measure the equator. [...] In other words to draw a line where no line has been before. Had they looked around outside? Lines happen somewhere else.” Kehlmann allows Humboldt to answer: “Lines happened everywhere [...]. They were an abstraction. Wherever there was space as such, there were lines.”² He thus describes the line as movement in space.

Renate Krammer’s line is neither descriptive nor representative but, rather, an object and a key player in the work itself. Krammer uses the artistic process per se to empirically research the potential of the line and of paper as a material. She is as fascinated by the multiple possibilities generated by the differing hardness of the pencils, the materiality of the paper, the size of the picture plane, the intersections of the lines, and the parameters of space and pictorial conception as she is by any aspects of perception. Her clearly structured approach involves a sequence of successive processes that place color, material, surface, densification, and voids at the heart of her investigation of the image. Her positioning of lines creates structures. Lines permit the depiction of movements, directions, and speeds. Just as music has its tones and symbols and language its sounds and letters, the image also has its shapes and its design elements: its points, lines, surfaces, colors, materials, and formats, and also its dialogue with space—pictorial space as well as real space per se. Amongst these factors, the

¹ Andreas Marti, “Nulla dies sine linea – Von Plinius bis zu Paul Klee”, in: Zentrum Paul Klee/Tilman Osterwold (ed.), Paul Klee: *Kein Tag ohne Linie*, Ostfildern/Berlin 2005, pp. 42 ff. Transl. by R.H.

² Daniel Kehlmann, *Measuring the World*, New York, 2007, p. 96, transl. by Carol Brown Janeway.

most concise form is the point. When it moves across the surface of the image it leaves a trace—the line. This line can bend, tighten, cut through space, become thinner and thicker, and densify. It doesn't always have to be rigid, straight, and geometrical. Quite the opposite: Throughout the development of art the line has shown itself to be highly versatile and ambiguous. It has the quality of enabling new worlds, spaces, and associations to be created—and it often does so with minimum effort and with no need for narrative description.

Renate Krammer's graphic works are a dialogue between an outer and an inner reality, a continuous striving to exploit every formal possibility that has long since shifted away from the search for a literarily determined image. No longer describing or relating anything, her work directly reproduces exactly what it is. The lack of any illusion of depth in Renate Krammer's works is quite clear. That's not what they're about. All the elements are in the foreground and the background, alongside and on top of each other, at the same time. But even if her graphic works are abstract and appear exclusively devoted to the many possibilities offered by the form, this doesn't mean that the perception of nature is in any way excluded from Renate Krammer's oeuvre. Rather, the constantly changing clouds, flowering evening primrose, and beautiful chestnut blossom of her videos and photographic works demonstrate that she is an attentive observer. Not, however, that she sees herself as a photo or video artist. For her, these media offer a further way of expressing how she perceives her environment. And yet, perhaps it is precisely this sensitive awareness of her surroundings that enables her to free herself from any sense of illusionistic representation. The artist conducts her real dialogue with nature on paper: where the model and the pure form come together; where all that she has cognitively felt and experienced is transcribed, free of any expressive use of artistic media. At the same time, rather than being strictly formal, Krammer's works have a sensuality and emotionality that belie their order and sequential organization. Similarly, with their invariably freehand lines, they alternate stillness with movement, as if the artist is trying to reinforce our ability to see—or use the ambivalence of the openness and discipline of her composition to make us aware of life's contradictions and disruptions. She's interested in the structural, the concept of the drawn space that always emerges from and is fed by the formal. The issue is no longer the search for a motif or for abstraction per se but, rather, the investigation of multiple possibilities using the most reduced form of expression. Hence, the reduction to the line, to the simplest design element, is no restriction but, according to Renate Krammer, opens up "unlimited potential for forms and expression. The longer I explore the line, the more possibilities open up. This leads to a canon that investigates things deeply and generates an almost infinite number of possibilities." The artist is similarly convinced that "the more that something is reduced and simple, the more one appreciates it."³ The fact that she has also studied John Cage and his piano piece 4'33" from 1952, with which he revolutionized the relationship between music and silence, between art and the work, and between the artist and the public, is obvious.

In Renate Krammer's work, the line is a mental leap that occurs during the creative process and sometimes becomes denser or disappears into the picture plane. In this way, even if the pictorial space isn't regarded as illusionistic it still becomes a spatial continuum. The space in Renate Krammer's drawings isn't determinate. On the contrary: The lines and spaces

³ Unless stated otherwise, all quotes come from a conversation between the author and the artist in July 2022.

sometimes appear to expand beyond the sheet of paper. These drawings are characterized by their openness, by the interweaving of lines and points, empty surfaces, negative spaces, and areas of densification into floating forms, which are very consciously not anchored in the perspective space. And, as the artist underlines, they also emerge in a form of thoroughly meditative process. The fact that she always works with the same format, the same technique, and the same colors and that she doesn't consider the external form that the composition is seeking to find, forces the artist to internalize and focus on the work, but also to appreciate everyday life in a different, perhaps more concentrated way. Another interesting aspect is the way in which the working process inspires thoughts that then trigger formal changes or generate or, indeed, virtually insist upon pictorial ideas for future series. In such cases, Renate Krammer has long moved from working with the stimulation of her perceptions to the reality of the image itself. "The process of working is extremely important. One thing leads to another," says the artist, "and many ideas are generated, but at the end of the day it's all about the decision of what one actually realizes. I begin by developing many ideas in small format, before I then produce them on a large sheet of paper. I'm interested in working out the fine differences. No two possibilities are the same."

The works, which sometimes come together to form large series, are characterized by their knowing use of materials and the assuredness of their ductus. When viewing these series in particular one gets the impression that, even though the compositions initially appear to follow a strictly defined concept, they are actually taking their own autonomous steps and proceeding from one image to the next with a quasi-musical rhythm. Both this lightness and the implicitness of these gestures develop a continuous vibrancy as the series develop. Rather than imbuing her images with dogmatic geometry or disruptive gestures that rid them of their energy, Renate Krammer prefers to focus on the creation of poetical-lyrical spaces that sometimes reach a level of intense tension on the paper. The image begins to vibrate and to move and, through the overlaying of the individual pencil lines, to develop new chromatic shades. The choice of the background alone—whether black or white paper—leads to different works, even if the formal concept or format is the same. On one occasion, the lines are more integrated into the background and, on another, they appear to float before it. The space generates itself, simply from the relationship between the lines, or from the use of different graphite pencils with varying degrees of hardness, or by disrupting these lines with a colored line that emerges, crosses the image, pulls away, and disappears, before appearing again in another place. Through her use of the line and different graphite and colored pencils, Renate Krammer has developed an almost infinite cosmos of possibilities, yet her investigation goes even further and she also explores the infinite variety of paper as a material per se. Nothing is as versatile as paper: With its wealth of colors, patterns, and structures and its special haptic quality it offers almost endless variations—and Renate Krammer's work demonstrates this in a particularly impressive way. Whether she is working with velour paper, which occupies the interface between paper and a textile material, or with the different types of mulberry paper—new impressions and special textures are always being created, also as a result of the incident light. With its fine viscose coating, velour paper has a surface that recalls satin or strongly shimmering suede. One special feature of the artist's oeuvre is her scroll paintings on mulberry paper, in which she also sheds light on her investigation of Asian art and philosophy. The paper, which is produced from the bark of the mulberry tree, is also used by Renate Krammer with inlaid hemp or mango leaves. Sometimes bristly and hard, then velvety and soft, the paper is torn by the artist and fixed horizontally on the supporting medium with the torn edge generally

being colored. The result is a three-dimensional relief that is hung like a scroll painting or wall object, sometimes also embedded in the space as an installation, or presented in a frame – often as part of a series. And yet the paper seems to escape from the frame, to seek release from its two-dimensionality as a means of drawing attention to its sensitive, powerful materiality. The works that Renate Krammer has created here are special and original and they take her basic conceptual idea about the subject of the line to the next level.

This absorption and continuation of one and the same formal idea directly facilitates the depiction of change, but it also requires insight into the constantly changing realities of space and objectivity. It is precisely the richness of the variations and nuances of Renate Krammer's work that urge viewers to pause for a moment, in order to be able to immerse themselves in her pictures even more deeply. There's something mysterious about her works. "Creating art is essentially enigmatic and the passionate motivation of the artist is constantly driven by the opportunity to linger in the enigmatic and to address the situation of unpredictability."⁴

⁴ Markus Lüpertz, *Der Kunst die Regeln geben. Ein Gespräch mit Heinrich Hell*, Zurich 2005, p. 39. Transl. by R.H.