

On the Science of art from *Gabriele Uelsberg*

"Absolute knowledge leads to pessimism: Art is the remedy against this." Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

The artist Dorothee Golz develops her works on the grounds of a virtually scientific-analytic procedure. Her investigations of form and space disclose highly discriminating reflections of the diverse aspects of reality, relativity and subjective perception, whilst also functioning convincingly as autonomous visual statements. In a process marked by critical distance, subjective experience and profound personal consternation in equal measure, Dorothee Golz raises the central questions of her work intuitively, seeking to relate these to both her own everyday experiences and to global societal phenomena. In the context of such inquiry, Golz executes drawings and sculptures to transpose her subjective thoughts and emotions to a tangible, formable and thus perceptible reality.



In the course of her work, Dorothee Golz has evolved numerous visual metaphors describing the tension between subjective and objective perception, and innumerable aspects within this relationship. Exhibited at documenta X in Kassel in 1997, *Hohlwelt* successfully functioned as a symbol of this particular documenta which sought to reveal art, both visually and conceptually, as "a critical confrontation with the present". Catherine David's demand to find possible models of identification in our fractured society is related, in a very original way, to the "intellectual model" guiding Dorothee Golz.

Hohlwelt - as the model of a dream-like reality - at once lures and repels the viewer. Resembling a tangible thought balloon, the hollow inside of this transparent globe contains a world of microscopic proportions comprising apparently familiar objects and an amorphous, organic form conceivably borne of the subconscious. All the objects have been modified so that their distortions evoke a fish-eye perspective resembling the reflection in a soap bubble. It remains unclear to the viewer if what he sees is really within the bubble or outside it, merely appearing as a reflection on its outer surface. "The fish-eye perspective of the bubble emphasises this because it internalises the scene and separates it from our experience of it outside. The interior reveals itself as something that follows its own laws. The space at the centre of the bubble can be viewed from all sides; nothing is hidden from our gaze, but it doesn't follow the rules governing the reality to which we actually physically belong. In spite of all this transparency, a clear line of demarcation is drawn between here and there. It represents something else."

Often, the forms inhabiting the interiors of these bubbles as well as the pictorial language of the artist's drawings and other objects often recall the formal idiom of fashion and design of the 1960's - the period during which Golz cluttered her personal "world of dreams and nightmares" with pictures, everyday objects and scenarios. Her uncompromisingly precise method of analysis, occasionally verging on cynicism, dissects and reveals the inherent relativity of the visionary, sometimes almost naïve imagination of the 1960's, an epoch governed by the hegemony of, and unflinching belief in technological progress. In this connection, Dorothee Golz is primarily interested in displaying that human consciousness and perception of everyday objects, situations and experiences essentially remain subjective, and that this subjectivity may be accounted for the specific nature of a given individual's experience of reality. "Von der wissenschaftlichen Analyse eines nicht gelungenen Tages (On the scientific analysis of an unsuccessful day)" offers a particularly lucid example of the artist's scientific-analytic approach. This drawing depicts a group of men, recognisably scientists, observing a double line which resembles a DNA chain undulating vertically over the picture. They seem to be attempting to measure and evaluate subjective perception, seriously yet to futile ends. This apparently unsuccessful day has its tangible analogy in one of Dorothee Golz's sculptures, "Of more or less successful days", similarly comprising a chain of variously proportioned bulges meandering over the floor.

Dorothee Golz is fascinated and driven to further artistic inquiry by the impossibility of scientifically measuring an entity as subjective as an unsuccessful day. The inability of liberating the evaluations of reality and experience from the intrinsic subjectivity of its analysts and observers, who repeatedly lay an absolute scientific claim to objectivity and proof of it, motivates the artist's constant examination of different realities and modes of perception.

The most central aspect manifested by her work involves the sensory/sensual urge of expressing

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longing and desire. Dorothee Golz 's sculptures also function as objects of yearning and temptation. They often attract the viewer at first sight, then repelling him when he realises the bizarre nature of his existence. For the immediate harmlessness of these everyday things in fact conceals hazards and perversions which, if not always catching the viewer unawares, irrefutably exude an unsettling presence. "I work with forms which have their origin in the subconscious. They recall a world distorted by dream. Often pleasantly enticing, rounded forms appear, longing to be stroked. But their beauty is illusion. Especially my drawings address issues such as oppression and cruelty."

Dorothee Golz is fascinated by the psychological dynamics hidden behind what seems unambiguous and familiar. "I feel that it is becoming increasingly important for me to seek and represent the human content within things and objects."



Thematically - above all in the drawings - Golz's works investigate the roles of man and woman and their relationship in contemporary society. With humour, irony and occasionally sarcasm, her drawings articulate this particular quality of togetherness determined by reciprocal expectations, mutual misunderstandings and problems of communication. The artist dissects the clichéd conceptions of gender roles, employing the latter as metaphors of an oppressive world in which personal emotions and ideals rapidly nurture conflict and confusion, threatening everyday life. In many of her drawings, Dorothee Golz specifically examines the part of the woman as housewife and mother, establishing a tight narrative mesh of associations and thematic interpretations. In contrast to the indeterminably great scope of cross-references offered by the drawings, Golz's sculptures possess a clearer thematic focus. In spite their quantity, they address a more limited range of issues, functioning together as a hermetic concept of uncompromising pictorial concision. In this context, the drawings - with their characteristic complexity- may be defined as more experimental, often serving as formal points of departure for the sculptures. For instance, *successful and less successful days* is, as already mentioned earlier, directly based on a drawing.

The stringency of Dorothee Golz 's artistic approach results from her use of pictorial form to disrupt apparently linear thought. Her virtually scientific analyses of subjective and subconscious perceptions of reality are convincing on the grounds of both their logic and sound intuition. Precisely by coupling surreal elements with real objects, Dorothee Golz succeeds in rendering the world tangible through which we all constantly move without ever realising that it is not the world of truth. For "viewed objectively, art is a form of truth; art is philosophy and practice" - Renato Guttuso (1912 - 1987), indeed perhaps the only truth that counts.

Dorothee Golz 's pneumatology - simply saying something *from Johan Siebers*

The work of Dorothee Golz presents itself mainly in two dimensions: the dimension of freedom, or a certain lightfooted eclecticism in the way materials, styles and techniques are brought into dialogue - the artist is not concerned with references, quotations or connections to other artists or movements in art's past, but uses the full repertoire freely, innocuously and almost like a sampler, to shape her work along the second dimension, that of expression. The freedom in these works is the freedom of finding room to breathe fresh air again, a place of one's own. Expression is also a form of breathing, taking something in and pushing, blowing it out again. Moreover, breathing is a precondition for speaking, for expressing ourselves in the most human way, by the spoken word. This work is shot through with figures of thought relating to breathing, the breath, and what it entails: a kind of pneumatology, a theory of spirit as breath, air or wind. The relations between the organic and the technical we see in many aspects of Golz's work acquire their meaning against the background of this link between the materiality of expression and the meaning, or spirit, expressed. Pneumatology at times becomes pneumatics, but in that transformation it breathes life and possibility into the technical.



By "expression" I mean that through the works the artist is addressing us. She is not conveying a message or teaching us a lesson, but she is communicating with those looking at her work, telling us about things that concern her, inviting a reply rather than a reception. Because of this intrinsic structure, these works are always personal, they have a tone of voice. The reply, then, has to be personal as well. For me Golz's work expresses in a variety of manners (discursive, ironic, poetic, lapidary) and themes (growth, possibility, communication) an experience of reality we can come to understand further by elaborating the philosophical reply to which the work will invite some of us. I want to try doing that by looking at the concept of "possibility".

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Two matters of course: as Francis Bacon said, "If it can be explained, why bother to paint it". In other words, my reply to this work is not an explanation but simply me taking turns in saying something. The fact that is possible, and necessary for reality to have meaning, is itself a precondition for, and one of the central themes of, Golz's works. And, secondly, art in Europe has not been expressive for a long time. Here, it is so again but without the burden of an expressionist aesthetic. Like I said, it is freely saying something, one hopes: simply saying something.

There are a number of ideas associated with possibility. We can think of a possibility that is as yet unrealised and, perhaps, only imagined in fantasy, but perhaps longing for the moment it can actualise itself, destroying some of the identities and fixed patterns that were there before to open up new realms as yet unheard of. When something like that happens, the old order, so to speak, looks disenchanted and petty in the light of what has now the prime right to speak. An example is the concept of "humanity", reduced to a complacent deadlock in the presence of all that life can be over and above that, in the presence of the "aliens" (who, as any science fiction readers knows, we are of course ourselves). In the drawing *Thema heute: Humanitäres Handeln* we witness the breakdown of one of our most cherished concepts today when that concept is not permeated by the awareness of what is unrealised in humanity today, something of which we have only the vaguest understanding. But one thing is clear: it involves the recognition of what is different to what we are now, the recognition that meaning may well entail the break-down of the possibility of a universal communication. Or even that the complacency of universal understanding destroys humanity. Growth and development change into the unforeseen, acceptance of what is radically different as what it is, constitute being human.

The human condition, however, is prone to fixing itself in the monotony of madness, method and cruelty, giving the human touch an inexorable ambiguity, harshness and also ridicule (as in the "scientific analysis of a bad day", which, like *Humanitäres Handeln* expresses the pointlessness of fixed ideas and methods).

In this sense of "possibility" (the possibility that is not yet but can be) it can be said that by entertaining possibilities, we can be ourselves. But there is more: for non-human reality is like us in this respect. Nature, but even artefacts, things, carry with them the unrealised that gives them meaning, direction, a challenge. This comes out in the staged dialogue between isolated objects of different sorts we see in some of the drawings, but also in the chairs cut in halves only to find their completion in another, creating a movement of an almost self-perpetuating nature, like life itself, but not without the permanent accompaniment of isolation and the need for completion.

Then there is another, more speculative side to possibility. The same personal, dialogical attitude that structures the formal characteristics of Golz's work, can be felt, occasionally, in the plain fact of the reality of all there is. I am not concerned here with the question whether this is a case of reading our own sentiments into reality; what counts now is what this experience of reality as such means, namely that all there is, simply because it exists, addresses everything else, in some way. To experience this is to experience that all reality is meaningful in some way and has a value for its own sake. But this value is itself nothing else than the possibility in, and of, existence. The possible surrounds and carries the world and ourselves, shielding it against disintegration, and foreshadowing the directions of growth, of exchange, of movement, without which all things would collapse into nonexistence. Without the movement into what is other, or what is not yet, things cannot be themselves and the realm of possibility would not be the carrier of reality. In a well-known line by the old mystic Angelus Silesius, as we know quoted by a number of philosophers: "The rose blooms while she blooms." Its possibility is the hand which carries it, but that possibility is there as a "while", an extended movement, and only as such. This gives things their inner existence.

In the *Hohlwelt* we come to see that the possible is the realm surrounding what is actual, insofar as it grows, as it comes to existence and maturity. But this realm is hollow, it is not a ground or structure. And it requires itself the constant supply of fresh air. It breathes, bringing what is outside in order to sustain the inner sphere. Moreover, there are many *Hohlwelte*, multiplying in different directions like mutating cells. For such is the nature of the possible, and as such, as a pluralistic mutation, does it guarantee communication.

These thoughts and, insofar as they speak to the works Golz makes these works of art, tend to be at ease only with themselves, and being at ease is their ultimate driving force. Because of that, they run the risk of triteness and, even more dangerous of conservatism, finding satisfaction in a mere contemplation of the way things are, thus losing their own possibility, their own future, and with that their own *raison d'être*. Around the corner of this experience of life, of this metaphysics of breathing, this pneumatology, lies engagement as the next possibility after address and reply. I hope to find in Golz's future work a shaping of engagement that remains true to the spirit of freedom and endeavour that has guided her reshaping of the expressionist moment in art - because I myself simply can't wait for someone to repoliticise art.

