

Frauke Schlitz – mappa

The expeditions of early modern times were motivated by the exciting idea to forge ahead into new areas. To enter the unknown step by step means to extend borders. At the same time the occupation of newly-discovered areas brings about their formation, because redevelopment of space is always connected to the conception of its significance or function.

The history of maps began parallel with the first expeditions. The maps of early modern times were much more than mere illustrations of newly-discovered regions: they reflected spiritual and ideological horizons. Their design was influenced by criteria relating to the history of salvation. It was the expression of a cosmology and was characterised by the concept of micro- and macrocosm. The first maps emerged from a confluence of the exact sciences and the arts of that period, because in early modern times artists and the arts naturally had an important say in their preparation: intellect and aesthetic perception were not principles of exclusion when penetrating and presenting new knowledge.

Cartography today suggests the dominance of the exact science of surveying and thereby the ultimate victory of rationality. It culminates in the development of satellite-controlled methods of orientation like the GPS. However, on closer inspection one discovers that even today the absolute pictorial truth is not possible. The position of satellites in outer space is not objective at all, but rather determined by the political and economic interests of their owners. The same applies to conventional maps, whose qualities depend directly on the specific political, social and economic intentions of the map-makers themselves.

Frauke Schlitz's "mappa" plays a part in the discussion on the significance, relevance and interests of cartography. In her current installation the artist shows all the cultural dimensions of cartographic representation. At the same time she calls upon the right of the arts to perceive the mechanism of thinking, arranging and categorizing on the basis of the subject "map" in a self-evident and self-confident way. At the same time she explores the possibilities of her own sculptural medium.

"mappa"- the title of the exhibition –has a double meaning etymologically. It means not only the antependium of an altar but also map. The term therefore establishes a connection between a spiritual element and an object made and conceived by man. This double aspect, which comprises rationality and emotion, determines Frauke Schlitz's site-specific installation for Reutlingen and is evidently realized there. The fascinating, rhythmically structured course finds its way along two axes, evolving from a central line of huge pillars, which subdivide the space. Cool, silver-grey objects dominate the left axis. They tend more strongly towards the rational side of the human being. The colourful detailed table located in the right axis appeals to the emotional side. A second leitmotif also pervades the installation. It unites itself with a basic reflection related to mapping: on the principle of a map spread out on a table showing the world, or part of it in a compact overview, an aspect of the human hubris manifests itself, in order to assign the world to itself in the form of exemplary model.

In Reutlingen, the whole exhibition space becomes a walk-in model situation. It is developed along its length and breadth, and its own categorical characteristics have been explored. Various artistic categories are tested, developed and portrayed in it.

The individual components open up areas within the space. Vice versa, a room with its own reference system is created by the sum total of all components, in which politically-laced

cartographical terms like “territory” or “territorial development” are also examined and become subject to investigation by sculptural means.

The illustrations, objects, and installation ensembles themselves cover all forms of conception. They move from the surface to three-dimensional proportions and back, and develop overtones bordering on tangible reality and the appearance of a thing.

The relation of the parts to each other is of a more manifold, sensually perceptible and intellectual nature. The elements conjugate all possibilities of visual map presentation but remove themselves again, by installing their own symbolic and graphical system. Recurrent structures form analogies, connections and local crossings. They meet in different materialisation: drawn, painted, constructed, and reflected. Their references also conclusively examine the principle of micro-and macrocosms on an emblematic level.

The prelude to the room is created by large drawings entitled “Butterfly-Map” and “Terra Incognita”. The interlocking of geometrical line drawings and deep three-dimensionally layered colour surfaces results in an unmistakably poetic cartography. The “nets”, once also called “garments” by the artist, form the conclusion. They consist of laminated maps, cut out in such a way that only the faint outlines of country borders, rivers and streets are left so that they stand out from the wall like stiff cloths and in interplay of light and shadow they accentuate the creative features of a map – line and surface.

Eye-catching in the first half of the room are the three “hemispheres”. In each of them two amorphous forms cast from aluminium are placed in wooden stands specially conceived for their proportions. The outer design is the result of a classical sculptural process. The presentation provides this sculpture called “hemispheres” with a reference to the historical Kunst- und Wunderkammer, whose grand representations of the world belonged to the treasures of the applied arts and which moreover embodied the greatest and most modern demands for knowledge.

Distributed around the room are three tables with topological and topographical cartographies of quite a different type. The coloured design of the first table “Plan B” falls back on the colours predominant in maps: pastel pink, green and yellow. The cypress-like, white elements on the tilted plane function as perspective scenic reference quantities and establish relationships to the subjects of proximity-distance. The object, which has been shaped on a lathe, is pierced through the tabletop and forms a transition to the neighbouring video. There, like a perpetual metronome-like self-moving pendulum, it visualizes the aspect of spatial location both in an obvious and minimalist manner.

On the surface of the second table “mappa I”, the artist has copied a Buckminster-Fuller map. This type attempts to show the continents proportionately accurate and thereby corrects our Eurocentric view of the world. It is partly painted over and covered with structures, similar to those on the drawings and thus released from their illustrational function. In the drawing, a conglomerate of surfaces and body-like parts on stilts rises upwards. Broad sheet-metal strips were pushed and crushed until the shape was established by itself in accordance with the flexibility of the material. As demarcated objects standing up against the rest of the space they establish a kind of territory. They are captivated by aluminium grids, which have been crushed into cubes. It is only through the conflicting interplay of contrasting form elements, which are utilised like a vocabulary of sculptural thought and work, that the architectural construction emerges.

In the middle of this table, a column prefabricated from seemingly boundlessly duplicating industrial base elements raises itself. The whole environment reflects itself in it. A colourful and dynamic picture of the room is revealed in the multiple refraction: the relation of fact and fiction in our perception of reality is turned upside down. With a cunningly chosen artifice comparable to the baroque anamorphous, in which this only appears “correct” and recognisable in a reflecting cylinder in the middle of a distortedly painted object, Frauke Schlitz sharpens the scepticism about supposedly exact methods of surveying and locating, as claimed by cartography.

“mappa II” is formally the most radical of the table sculptures. From the immaterial grey of the aluminium slabs, obviously manually deformed silver objects burst out like islands from nothing. The ensemble does not appear to have been made by the hand of man. It establishes a connection to the morphological, seemingly organic architecture prepared on the computer and stands for a type of spiritual yet conceivable space or a corresponding landscape.

The comprehensive aspect of this installation and its integration in an existing room corresponds to the wonderful floor drawing made of gouache. In a subtle way, Frauke Schlitz follows the given lines, develops extensive areas and at the same time expands the spectrum of expressional possibilities of lines from strict lineation to organic freedom. She combines to a spiritual and formal unity the qualities of drawing as a process of consciousness and a visualisation and documentation of existing structures, as it is only possible to produce through art.

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