

Pictorial worlds

The term panorama derives from the Greek and means “all” and “view”—to see or have an overview of everything. A panorama permits the viewer a broad overview or special look at something, usually a landscape or a manmade landscape, a city.

Panoramas appear in Nicole Wendel’s drawings repeatedly and in various guises. Her recent large-scale drawings are executed in a panoramic format, spread horizontally in front of the viewer. The horizontal format appears as well in Nicole Wendel’s fanfolds, which are smaller and more intimate in size but nevertheless wish to be glided over with the eyes.

The elongated format lends the drawings a reading direction, orders their events, and, in the case of the large-scale works, stresses the moment of landscape. But it is not only the representational elements that define the works; abstract and gestural elements also emerge, offering a permanent trace of the performative process of creation.

Nicole Wendel begins each drawing with a fast, intuitive process she engages with her whole body. She covers her hands in graphite dust and moves them across expansive sheets of paper laid out upon the floor so that cloud-like formations emerge. Her waving arms produce sometimes circular, sometimes jagged, energetic strokes. Marks derived from feet and fingers loosely cover the sheets. This first phase of the drawing process is determined inwardly, by the rhythm of the body in space. This is the starting point for a second step, whereby abstract elements are reworked in a slower, more rational process that further defines any landscape, architectural, or figural elements.

This approach, which contains both unconscious and conscious moments, reveals a connection to the artistic processes of the Surrealists, such as Automatism. There seems to be a close relation to Max Ernst, whose paintings from 1925 onward employ the techniques of frottage and grattage he developed. And in his pictures that gave chance an important role in their creation, natural forms meld with magical beings that seem to emerge from the unconscious.

These two elements—the abstract and the figurative—form the poles between which the drawings of artists like Max Ernst and Nicole Wendel oscillate. Sometimes they merge with each other, and one comes out of the other, or sometimes they just sit next to each other, constituting different levels. By sliding from the figurative to the abstract, the narratives in Nicole Wendel's drawings are more indicated than formulated. Birches stand by the water, subtly reflected in it; a mountain range stretches along a horizon; skeletal architecture strives towards the heavens. Such realistic moments occur freely in Nicole Wendel's work—at one moment distributed fragmentarily across the surface, and in the next disappearing into the emblematic and gestural. These undefined places—the direct, energetic trace of the drawing hand, white areas on the paper—are consciously deployed by the artist. They keep the overall composition in balance, allowing the viewer to engage with the works and then left wondering about their loose narrative ends.

Despite some almost filmic elements—particularly pronounced in the fanfolds—Nicole Wendel's drawings follow more of an internal logic than a linear narrative flow. This emphasis on the subjective world, outside pure rationality, derives from Romantic ideas and thoughts. Other characteristics of this epoch, such as the poeticization of reality and a passion for the unattainable, can be identified in Nicole Wendel's drawings. Like the Romantics, she too wants her works to touch us and to evoke a certain feeling or mood. Her drawings are supposed to speak to us not only rationally, but also physically and emotionally, providing a holistic experience of art, a true encounter between viewer and work.

Julia Trolp, 2013