

A majestic mountain rises up in the distance. In the bottom left, on an indistinct, light background, pine silhouettes emerge, tousled by the wind. To the right is a lake, on the far shore of which the reflections of trees play on the water. In the foreground are small reeds. From the top of the mountain, swarms of birds seem to fly, towards the top right edge of the work – they seem to be struggling with the daylight, getting progressively darker. This is an initial, objective approach to the drawing, *Panorama 2/2014*. A classical landscape, albeit of fragile construction. A second approach, seems to suggest a landscape subjected to a process of visual destruction: thick, black lines with soft edges strafe the left-hand side of the image, while on the right, the lines are sinuous, taking up the zig-zag of the mountain. These lines are nestled between the contours of trees, asserting themselves as an autonomous presence on the paper. Footprints next to these lines betray an origin – traces of bodies moving in disordered or rhythmic fashion. These are supplemented by large circles in pencil and by fingerprints that blur and overload the physical surface of the drawing. In *Panorama 2/2014*, there is also, in the circular, compass-made marks which extend over the whole of the paper, explicit reference to László Moholy-Nagy and his 'Kinetic Construction System with tracks for play and conveyance' (1928). Such abstract, expressive, gestural lines and marks can be seen as pathways, both literally and figuratively. They emphasize the corporeal dimension in the process of creating the work and also serve as keys to understanding the works of Nicole Wendel in general, attesting as they do to an abstract dimension which precedes the objective approach.

At the beginning of the creation process for each of these drawings, the artist placed a large sheet of paper on the ground. This sheet would receive and record the contemplative movements by which Wendel engages in her study of the relationship between the body, space and the format of the image. Only after this initial stage is visual control brought to bear on the work - the rational

combination of abstract lines, circles, spots and footprints with the work's identifiable landscapes and objects. The composition takes shape and, henceforth, only the pencil – held in the artist's hand – separates the body from the image.

Through use of photographic models, Wendel explores the full range of graphic possibilities, thus giving her often surreal landscapes a convincing – if illusory – spatiality. Structures, surfaces and lines are organized into autonomous "world views" which seem, by turns, to obey a dream-tinted logic or film-like narrative. The viewer is invited to contemplate these large-format drawings along with the manner of their creation – a dialogue between gestural abstraction and illustrated reality. As each drawing constantly calls into question the designation and legibility of lines and objects, the viewer is required to use different approaches to "bring out" the image. The viewer encounters, in so doing, a characteristic ambiguity of illustration – charcoal marks on white paper – which manifests itself in a choice: one can read these traces literally, as marks made on the paper, or employ them in the service of the object[s] being represented. Gottfried Boehm calls this the tension between the already-complete and the still-possible, the iconic difference between a figure and a field which defines the particular charm of drawing, as opposed to a "fully orchestrated painting"¹. This ambiguity is particularly manifest in Nicole Wendel's drawings and their many passages between areas defined by abstract gestures and ones marked by objectivity. A sense of movement in the viewer is generated. The eye follows the pathways, seeking to identify and recognise. It gets lost in the paper but finds, in the meantime, certain clues with which to proceed - something identifiable here or a thickening deep black line there. Contrary to more usual formats, Wendel's Panoramas, Leporellos and large-format representations of bodies make it practically impossible to take in the whole image in a single glance. The eye is invited on a journey, rather, which one's body takes too, arriving subsequently at an image of the work in its entirety.

¹ Gottfried Boehm : Spur und Gespür. Zur Archäologie der Zeichnung. In: Öffnungen. Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Zeichnung, hg. v. Friedrich Teja Bach und Wolfram Pichler. München: 2009, P. 46

With this way of working, the artist also invites us to return to the very origins of drawing. According to the legend related by Pliny the Elder, the potter, Butades of Sicyon, created the first portrait based on a silhouette. In order to keep alive the memory of his departing lover, his daughter traced the profile of the lover's shadow on the wall. The father then baked a reproduction in clay. For the first time, the direct trace of a body was sublimated onto a surface – the portrait of a body that would, henceforth, be absent. In semiotics, the indexical sign, which indicates a direct relationship with the physical object, becomes an iconic sign in its relationship or similarity to the represented object² .

In the legend, a projection, and its associated shadow, are used as part of the image creation process. Nicole Wendel radicalises this process by using her body - hands and feet - to coat the material surface of her image with graphite. Her drawings make visible the tension – the proximity – of the indexical and iconic functions of signs.

In all her work, Nicole Wendel aims to dissolve and transform genre boundaries. She allows her drawings to take on some of the time-based and performance aspects of spatial installations. The exploratory principles developed in these drawings – bringing spatio-temporal layers into contact with each other – are evident also in her video and photo work.

The title of the series Staubfinger (finger/dust) is a reference to the gradual association of the drawing hand and the body in space. Made abstract by an envelope of clear elastic tissue, the body appears here as a living sculpture inscribing, for a few fleeting moments, a unique alphabet in the vastness of the landscape.

In this series, space extends like a reservoir of stories and events and the multiple light sources allow the artist to overlay the impressions, intentionally chosen, left by different places. To do so, she employs the techniques of analog black and white photography: with the aid of "light painting", and in a manner which brings to mind photograms, Wendel makes visible the layering of impressions and situations and, like a palimpsest, creates images that seem to

² Pliny the Elder XXXV, XLIII, 151, vgl. Wolfram Pichler und Ralph Ubl: Vor dem ersten Strich. Dispositive der Zeichnung in der modernen und vormodernen Kunst. In: Randgänge der Zeichnung, hg. v. Werner Busch, Oliver Jehle und Carolin Meister. München: 2007, P. 233f.

illustrate the way we build memory itself. There is also a subtly disturbing play at work here – that of the body's presence and absence, its existence and fragility.

In all of Nicole Wendel's works, the body seems to be the gravitational centre of artistic enquiry, a source from which the flow of associations seeks various forms of expression. Rather than conceiving of the body as an object to be arranged, exhibited, distorted or questioned in its entirety, she draws our attention to the body in motion, an inescapable starting point for all art.

Wendel presents the body as a site for crossings, an intermediary between inner and outer worlds, between impression and expression. The artist's own body perceives the world, imagines it and reacts thereupon. In Nicole Wendel's artistic cosmos, the body is used like a line, like a mark made on the surface of the drawing. In her photographic works, videos and performances, which engage the viewer in a dialogue, she tries to ensure that the body is not a blind spot, attempting to prevent it too from disappearing behind modes of representation, data, statements or contexts.

During performances, viewers are able to participate in the creation of drawings and in their metamorphoses. The artist conceives of these performances as conscious examinations of the moment, intense events that develop freely within a pre-prepared framework of sequences and movements. Thus she adds a temporal dimension to the possibilities offered up by drawing. She shows that, in the before and after, there is always more than can be perceived by the eye alone. She invites us to participate in the seemingly irresistible circular motion of creation, transmission and destruction, bringing forth an impression of the intense calm which, as in the switch from breathing in to breathing out, exists between oppositions.

We might also consider these works as visual poetry: they make manifest intimate images that emanate from a condition that precedes speech and concepts and which, with the aid of the body, make paths for themselves from the inside out. Nicole Wendel's art is an investigation, a body advancing, by touch, towards reality.

In a context in which we are increasingly presented with virtual pseudo-experiences, Wendel's work can also be understood as a plea for investigation,

for touch, for direct contact between man and his environment. If, as viewers, we allow ourselves to be guided by these invitations, our contemplation of the proposed trails can become a total artistic experience, reaching another level in our capacity for perception.

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