

Text from the catalogue „Ashore“, published in conjunction with the exhibition „Expeditionen“ at the Ostholstein-Museum Eutin in march 2008.

By Simone Jung, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Ashore

...is the title of this catalogue bearing the same name as the latest series of Anja Klafki's intaglios (fig. p. 17-31). Taken from the term "to go ashore" the title establishes a relationship to land and water – be it sea, lake or river. Relative to Anja Klafki's artwork one could argue that "Ashore" marks a new turn in her work, a move towards landscape and a departure to new shores as well as an arrival, a discovery and exploration.

The artist, who lives and works in Stuttgart, explores the subject of landscape in her own special way, creating large-scale intaglios for six years now. Her intent is mainly to explore the *description* of landscapes. What is a landscape? How do we perceive landscape? What does the minimal imaging repertoire consist of to define a landscape visually?

The metal plate, the paper and the printing press are Anja Klafki's tools – and she knows them well! She has dealt with intaglio for years. She has explored the technique, determining the possibilities of what can and can not be done with the zinc plate, challenging and exceeding the traditional limitations of the medium, and – in the process – developing her own iconographic language. The zinc plates are treated in a rather sculptural manner, using hammer and bevelled-edged chisel. Parts of the plate are thrust out, producing chipped edges with more or less erratically curved or jagged and slightly frayed outlines. Their relief-like structures define the forming contours during the printing-process with a strikingly sculptural quality. The separate plates are combined and optionally printed from the front or back side. Thus the plates are not just a means to an end, i.e. a matrix carrying a motif; instead the plates are actually part of the motif itself. Together their plate-tonal imprint and the original white parts of the paper form the essential figurative elements of the composition, which often spans several frames. Their divisional basic structure comprises an important compositional element.

Initially exploring the intaglio technique itself, Anja Klafki is now aiming to discover the essence of visual landscape descriptors, thereby creating her own iconographic language.

As early as the Renaissance period, the term "landscape" ("Landschaft") was established as a Fine Arts term for the visual description of a part of nature. This fragmentary view is carried to extremes in Anja Klafki's works. To begin with she chooses cut-outs from sketches and photographs that she has made herself or were generated by the media, and subjects them to a process of abstraction. By selecting only elements of details and transferring these to the printing plates with her unique technique, she creates entirely new compositions. The interchange of mostly horizontally drawn surfaces, partly overlapping each other, and the still untouched white portions of the printing paper

results in a panorama-like view with a three-dimensional effect. Nevertheless, the layer printing process is revealed to the spectator in a kind of puzzle picture.

The series "Lake", which was developed in 2006 (fig. p. 37 a. 39) added an essential technical modification. For the first time Anja Klafki combined intaglio with a relief-printing method which produced very intense coloured surfaces. This involves a homogeneous colour imprint corresponding with the articulate shapes, clear-cut edges and smooth round forms. These parts are countered by the uneven shapes of the intaglio printed parts, characteristically marking the plate's tonality with the scratched structures of the zinc-metal.

Mostly placed at the bottom of the picture and embedded into the white of the printing paper, the clear-surfaced, coloured relief-printed parts focus your attention. Your eyes are immediately guided towards the less intensely coloured intaglio prints, which are more complex in shape and appearance. The impression is that of coloured surfaces and spots barely noticed at the brink of your visual field. Thus the viewpoint is virtually locked into the white parts, which limit and partially even cut into the coloured surfaces. However the sketchy impressions of mountains and hills in the upper section of the picture seem to lie in the remote distance.

The examination of how to define and describe a space has always been one of the main criteria of Anja Klafki's work. Developing this more pictorial approach, her artwork now achieves a different, extended significance, complementing her previous more sculptural orientation. Her large works, often consisting of multiple framed pieces, which remind the viewer of a panoramic view through a picture-window, emphasize this aspect. The art exceeds the classical limitations of the frame, while stretching compositional elements across several framed printing papers, allowing you to imagine that it could continue beyond the frame.

It is an elaborate game between representation and abstraction: abstract on the one hand, and absolutely representational and concrete in documenting the material's character on the other hand. Oscillating between these poles the green and blue coloured compositions shown in this catalogue immediately provoke associations of mountains, shores and coastal areas; in fact, they only consist of material shaped segments with some naturalistic hints, sometimes abruptly breaking off mid-picture into roughly-cut vertical edges. These disruptions create an inspiring aesthetic appeal. This helps to avoid an interpretation that is far too narrative and romanticized. At the same time, spectators are free to make their own associations, and complete the Gestalt of the fragments shown.

It is a game, too, playing with viewer's ability of association and the viewer's willingness to get involved. Anja Klafki lures the viewer into an easy and playful, though subtly serious, way towards this goal, forcing the viewer to get involved. According to prevalent knowledge about the psychology of perception, human beings are generally capable of perceiving their environment only in a fragmentary and selective way. This applies for the global meta-level as well as for basic sensory perception.

Usually we only perceive sections of the surrounding reality. Our brain fills in the lacking parts, comparing our current visual impressions with earlier experiences. Therefore, a vision is the result of an active – though unconsciously running - process of interpretations, classification and combination. Thus mental delusions are never far away. On the other hand, interpreting the pictures is only possible for people who already have an image in their mind, disposing of the actual visual experience. For example “Lake IV” (fig. p. 39) can easily be associated with the famous Matterhorn peak.

Comparing the works in this catalogue with Anja Klafki’s earlier expression of landscape¹, it becomes obvious that her conceptual examination of the description of what a landscape is has continued to develop and grow in complexity. By combining the various fragmentary parts, the rough disruptions and the increasing abstraction of forms, the artist dissociates herself step by step with the depiction of illusive impressions, inventing a more and more self-contained and independent iconography. But in doing so the compositions with their stark simplicity and strong graphical approach are nevertheless perfectly self-evident as landscapes.

This reveals an artistic self-consciousness which does not base its premise on theoretic structures, but on self-developed fundamentals and continuous work by an open mind that includes on-going queries about, and discussion and advancement of her own artwork.

¹ Anja Klafki – Radierungen, edition lüth, Halebüll-Schobüll, 2002; Grafik Radikal, Stadtgalerie im Elbforum, Brunsbüttel, 2004; Anja Klafki – Land, anders.art.edition, Elmshorn, 2005
