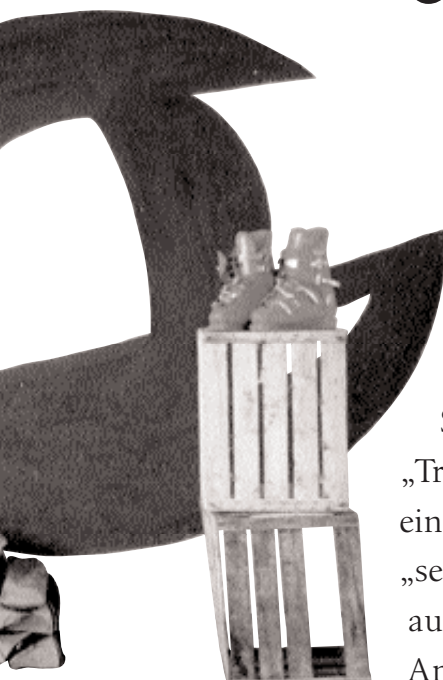


Frau von Wolf oder die Lücken im Bild

Manfred Hermes



„Die menschliche Welt ist keineswegs als eine Umwelt strukturierbar, in die eine Innenwelt von Bedürfnissen eingefügt ist, sie ist nicht geschlossen, sondern offen für eine Masse von ausserordentlich vielfältigen neutralen Objekten, Objekten sogar, die in ihrem radikalen Funktionieren als Symbole nichts mehr mit Objekten zu tun haben.“ *Jacques Lacan*

„Traumartig“ ist nicht unbedingt das vorteilhafteste Adjektiv, um die Arbeiten einer zeitgenössischen Künstlerin zu beschreiben. Da könnte man auch gleich „sensibel“, „magisch“ oder „seelenvoll“ sagen. Und trotzdem deutet dieses Wort auf Erfahrungen, die ich beim ersten Mal mit einem der Bilder von Amelie von Wulffen gemacht habe, einer Schwimmbadszene aus dem Jahr 2000/01 (Abb. S. 45). Der verkantete Raum dieser Collage ist aus Fotos zusammengesetzt, deren Perspektivlinien von der Künstlerin unrealistisch weitergemalt wurden und in dessen Durchgängen sich neue Räume zu einem Abgrund des „Ähnlichen“ öffnen, wobei das grosse Format dieser Arbeit weiteren Nachdruck erzeugt. Diese Szenerie einer latenten, „sozialdemokratischen“ Erotik kollidierte vor allem aber mit einer Wiedererinnerung. Ich fühlte mich nämlich an einen meiner wiederkehrenden Träume erinnert, in dem ich in meiner jeweiligen Wohnung bis dahin verborgene, aber erfreulich grosse Trakte entdeckte.

Später stellte ich dann fest, dass dieser verstörende Effekt der Verschiebung in den meisten von Amelie von Wulffens Arbeiten auftritt, etwa in ihren Stadtcollagen von 1998/99 (Abb. S. 6–16). Aus Fassadenteilen von Wohn- und Geschäftshochhäusern der

Frau von Wolf or the Gaps in the Image

Manfred Hermes

"The human world isn't at all structurable as an *Umwelt*, fitting inside an *Innerwelt* of needs, it isn't enclosed, but rather open to a crowd of extraordinarily varied neutral objects, of objects which no longer even have anything to do with objects, in their radical function as symbols."

Jacques Lacan

"Dreamlike" is not necessarily the most advantageous adjective for describing the works of a contemporary female artist. You might just as well say "sensitive," "magical," or "soulful." And yet this word can be applied to the kind of experiences I had the first time I encountered a collage by Amelie von Wulffen — an image of a swimming pool, dated 2000/2001 (fig. p. 45). The tilted space of this collage consists of an assemblage of photographs whose lines of perspective the artist has "extended" by painting them further, taking them to a point of unreality, so that passages open up into new spaces, creating an abyss of "similarities" — an effect further enhanced by the large format of the work. For me, however, this scene of latent "social democratic" eroticism coincided with a recollection, for I was reminded of a recurring dream in which I discover to my delight that my apartment contains additional large spaces I had not previously known about.

Later, I realized that this disturbing, shifting effect appears in most of von Wulffen's works. Take, for instance, her 1998/1999 urban collages (figs. pp. 6–16), where the artist took façades of apartment and office buildings from the late 1970s, or pulpits, cubicles, or oriels, and piled them up into looming urban landscapes with a Piranesi-like quality. Pessimistic, wobbly, and somehow lacking function, they form scenarios that depict the surveillance and regulation of social relations. Here, too, the artist's method of placing photographs next to each other or sliding them into one other and then extending existing lines leads to the creation of a hallucinatory space full of urgency, threat, and fascination.

In her collage of the chancellor's office (2002; figs. pp. 82–85) von Wulffen added a new aspect to what might be called a negative, constructivist kind of imagery. The exterior perspectives open up, simultaneously becoming inseparable interiors. In this case, however, the rounded, floating galleries and lounges, the bulls'eyes, and the practically inaccessible staircases—in other words, the whole madness of design overwhelmed by form—all correspond to the architectural reality of the Berlin government district.

Nonetheless, despite their close relationship to reality, von Wulffen's images resemble the Surrealist collage in terms of their volume and plasticity, Dada in terms of format, and Constructivism in terms of their plunging perspectives. However, her understanding of space differs from that of the artist's historical models in one crucial point: von Wulffen is not interested in a random arrangement of sharply isolated elements. Rather, the effects are revealed through an illusion brought about by complicated layering, enfilade, and abysses that interlock and extend into the depth of the space: the window within the window, and within that, a view in which the scene becomes lost in the greenish, watery effect of an infinitely reflecting reflection.

Beginning in 2002, von Wulffen expanded upon the architectural motifs in her collages by allowing completely opposing elements or situations to collide or slide into one another. From that point on, various social spheres, different public zones, and diverse art-historical and autobiographical references are brought together. "Corners" of middle-class domesticity, with their floor lamps, carpets, respectable framed oil paintings, and tasteful modern elements are juxtaposed with exterior perspectives and motifs taken from nature. Apartments melt into landscapes or train interiors and their rows of windows.

By "extending" wall surfaces, ceiling slats, and lines of perspective by painting them further, the artist enlarges the small spaces of the photographs and increases their depth. This leads to collages assembled from contrasting views, light sources, openings, and lines of perspective, which overlap or plunge into each other. Here, the viewer participates in both the dissection and reassembly of the given elements.

Despite all this discontinuity, "space" is maintained. Within the space, however, it is not only sections of photographed interiors that are blended together, but also different genres, themes, and media, including photography, painting, collage, drawing, and installation, all of which further relativize the photographic evidence of her original material. In the new, faceted environment, these photographs also form islands that capture and focus the gaze, while at the same time scattering the past they represent—and with that past, much of the photographs' autobiographical substance. In this new context, the artist also reformulates, in passing, genres such as landscape, seascape, or still life.

There is yet another remarkable and crucial feature of the collages created after 2002. As she extends the lines of perspective, von Wulffen also overlays them with a system of openings and ocular spaces that resemble portholes of ships or airplanes. These frames mark the presence of a gaze, even before pairs of eyes began to play a role in the images. Direct, planned visual relationships first appear in works that have completely done away with layering and fragmentation of the image—namely, in two series of drawings based on photographs. Although in the public scenes depicted in *Die graue Partizipation* (The Gray Participation), 2001 (figs. pp. 103–116), the distant or loosely connected figures are usually seen from the back, in some cases, the figures risk careful, furtive looks.

In contrast to this, in some of the drawings done from photographs of von Wulffen's grandmother, which date from the 1930s and 1940s, the gaze of this woman seems to gain a penetrating strength (figs. pp. 66–80), giving rise to the trance state described by Sigmund Freud in one of his case studies. In one of the young "Wolf Man's" dreams of angst, the windows suddenly fly open, and he sees a group of white wolves crouching in the night, motionless and staring, among the branches of a nut tree. From this image, Freud drew a well-known inverse conclusion: they are staring at me, so it must be my gaze; the figure is not moving, so something must be moving—very intensively—inside me.

This type of gaze could now be adopted and redirected, for example, at the small figure of a lone visitor to a museum, which appears in a 2001 collage (figs. pp. 46/47), bent over a railing of steel and travertine stone, looking into the depths of a pool. What the figure sees there is at first concealed from the person viewing the picture, but is shown in another collage from the same series (figs. pp. 52/53). It is a large model of Rome as it was during the fourth century A.D., which is on display in the Museo della Civiltà Romana, located in EUR, a district of Rome planned during Mussolini's rule.

Fans of model cities and toy railroads—and anyone interested in seeing great historical events and places depicted in miniature—love these kinds of models. Here, the eyes are allowed to wander and the gaze relishes comparisons, visions, and ideas. However, in this case, the projection itself has already been redirected and preformatted. This reconstruction of an ancient city of millions in minutiae is also a delusion that attempts to subjugate thousands of years of historical definitions and shore up all meaning. What is more, nowadays such excessively high expectations can no longer be fulfilled, since the Roman cultural museum has, in the meantime, clearly fallen into neglect.

This motif can also be understood as a reference to German Fascism, or it might represent a connection to von Wulffen's own family story, whose locations and characters are constantly being turned into material by the artist. The late romanticism of her grandparents' generation, its principles, and worldviews—which were as fixed as the hairdos