

Motoko Dobashi

The works of the Japanese artist Motoko Dobashi travel between the poles of painting, drawing, collage and installation. In addition to drawings and paintings in various formats, the artist has recently created, above all, space-encompassing and site-specific murals that playfully explore the dichotomy of romantic empathy in nature and civilizing estrangement. Thus, in the work *labyrinth* (2008), an impressive architectural prospect emerges out of a schematic landscape; as a fragment, the structure seems to formally evoke the Romantic world of thought. The viewer's attention is drawn to the nave of a church that is twisted out of herbaceous elements and is surrounded by soft clouds. Small squares, which are drafted in a lineage that is reminiscent of the central perspective used by the old masters, transverse the composition like small, extraterrestrial flying objects that are then expelled from the pictorial space. In *shelter* (2008), by comparison, a torrent gushes out towards the viewer, who is then washed away together with dice-shaped cubes and signet-like curved forms that act as surrogates for civilization. From this springs a distant, tree-crowned and mysterious mountain range that, in its drape-like quality, is reminiscent of drawings from the time of Dürer, and that is encompassed by a stylized sea of waves. In another manner the work *garden* (2009) picks up on the idea of the cultivated, deserted landscape – one that is beyond the viewer's reach – in the form of a small Paradise garden surrounded by mountains and clouds.

Dobashi's fragile worlds are characterized by a monochrome-quality made up of blue, green and gray shades. In interaction with the various surface structures, this coloring brings to mind long-forgotten graphic works, while simultaneously rejecting an equalization with the realistic representation of reality. Last but not least the compositions enchant viewers with their dynamic in space and through the use of unusual perspectives. Puffy cloud-like shapes, folds that pile up to become mountains and schematic landscapes pervaded by logo-like forms are all reoccurring elements that create these reality-displaced, fantastic spaces. Although they suggest a three-dimensionality and draw the viewer into the images' events, they simultaneously appear magical and unreal because of the abstracted forms and colors. It is the virtual, almost utopian structures and imaginary views of nature that are able to integrate the image worlds of the digital medium and the new spatial perceptions of the present, as much as it is the world of signets and advertising. Equally unusual is the artist's playful handling of the repertoire of art history. By bringing together various realities, she ignites the "spark of poetry," which Max Ernst already placed in the image. The topos landscape as the Romantic yearning for inner empathy in nature is also revised – even in the Romantic period it was not a question of the true, objective representation of nature's appearance, but rather of the reflections of nature inside the individual, in one's personal perception. It is these introspective states that characterize the landscape in the manner of Caspar David Friedrich and that reflect the spiritual conditions that go beyond the visible. Nature has a symbolic character; it transcends itself and that which can be experienced through the senses.

Dobashi's works thematize the contemporary, western-influenced human being's relationship with nature, a being who looks for compensation for a suffered loss in a surrogate. It is artificial nature-refuges with technoid charm that enchant the viewer here. What makes them unique, however, is the both subtle and harmonious combination of

European art with the artist's own cultural and Japanese background: Motoko Dobashi creates her works out of the visual pool of the code-like graphic picture language of Japanese Manga and the virtual worlds of computer games. The flowing lines, as well as the multiple perspectives, however, simultaneously refer to the legacy of traditional Japanese colored woodcuts. The examination of the form language of old German masters, such as Albrecht Dürer or Albrecht Altdorfer, is also perceptible time and again. Cloud-like color fields and a gestural style encounter a graphic layout of lines and logo-like constructs that are clearly inspired by the aesthetics of the media.

Motoko Dobashi is a member of a generation of contemporary artists, who adapt art history and its visual incidents as a matter of course. Strategies of appropriation and disintegration or the aims of the Modern movement, which found its expression, for instance, in the autonomization of the effect of form and color and in the concept of pure painting, are of secondary importance to her. Her interest lies, rather, in how reality is created and conveyed in the image. For this reason the artist is particularly interested in past periods, such as the early modern age or German Romanticism, whose approximations of reality she processes in an unusual manner; for historical companions and their opponents self-confidently enter the image together: the printed media, virtual worlds, logos. Dobashi allows these worlds to clash and simultaneously to forget their confrontation: all media are equal and every single cliché an event.

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