

Barbara Karsch-Chaieb, Silke Schwab, "Of Fibers and Mutants "

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introductory speech by Vivien Sigmund

For centuries our world was relatively decent concerning its constitution.

I quote: "The eternal universe contains four generating substances. Two of them are heavy, and it constantly pushes them downward, because their weight burdens them: the two are earth and water. Just as many lack gravity; they strive, because nothing presses them, in the height: the air and the fire which is purer than air. But although they are spatially separated, nevertheless everything becomes of them, and everything disintegrates into them", so does Ovid describe in his *Metamorphoses* the conception of nature at that time. It provided humans with orientation up to the 19th and 20th centuries, when science broke the world down into smaller and smaller parts. The clarity was gone. And even though science flourished, we subsequently dashed nature much against the wall. Today, we are rethinking cultural history. The world: a network. Earth, air, water: environmental media in the earth system. At least we attempt to understand the world as it is: as a whole.

And this brings us to the center of our exhibition by the artists Barbara Karsch-Chaieb and Silke Schwab, which is a kind of collaborative, aesthetically connoted conceptual space about us humans and our relationship to the environment. What both artists have in common is their fluid, processual way of working, this principle of *actio* and *reactio*, which runs through the genesis of their work, as, strictly speaking, through the whole world as a law of nature. In general, many of the artistic working methods of the two artists find their counterpart in natural processes, and some material is transferred directly from nature into the artistic sphere, where it leads the artificiality in the word "art" ad absurdum.

This is beautifully evident in what is probably the most striking work in the exhibition, the bamboo pole object "Shelter" by Barbara Karsch-Chaieb. The gigantic, almost crystalline wedged frame, darkly reminiscent of the construction of a shelter, seems to have grown out of its two smaller counterparts. It is a form with which Karsch-Chaieb has been experimenting for several years and which now confronts us here in space-filling conciseness. This object is inspired by the geometric apeirogon, a polygon with an infinite, yet countable number of sides. This sounds wonderfully contradictory. Especially since the object, a vague globe shape as a whole, consists in detail of countless straight lines. Molecule-like, one could almost say, a world framework thus in the figurative sense, the blow-up of an ideal elementary particle, which gives us one thing here on the spot: countless different views. It's almost like real life: Every step a new view, every observer a different perspective. The term apeirogon, by the way, comes from the ancient Greek *apeiron* - the unlimited, the indivisible. And to close the circle for now, in Greek philosophy *apeiron* stands for the legendary ether, the origin from which the four elements crystallized, so to speak. It is a small component of our world and the great indivisible in one form, gently various worldview's rub against each other in harmonious contradiction. This worldly construct, however, lashed together from sustainable bamboo and hemp fibers, seems so delicately balanced, so fragile, that one is forced to ask oneself whether it can really be a shelter for us or whether it does not rather need protection itself.

In the smaller versions, another material comes into play: the artist has partly coated the poles with soil from all over the world. Earth, once a noble element, then dirt and today a battered environmental medium. Earth is the life and limb theme of Barbara Karsch-Chaieb and at the end of my speech you can also experience that earth and stomachs can actually find each other in your own body. Layers of earth, in other words, in which the past of the world and of mankind is deposited, earth pigments that carry the unmistakable color nuances of the homeland - what a material! Karsch-Chaieb also creates images out of earth, layering, overlaying, mixing all the stories and history present in the material.

She explores the sediments of the world and humanity, culminating in the Anthropocene, through the means of art. And here it is almost as if she wants to additionally impregnate the small shelter sculpture with life and with the past and perhaps also with the future through the earth's sheathing.

In Silke Schwab's work, the human being - if not at first glance - is immanently present. We see prints of various colors and paper cuts. The material: quite fibrous, the approach: clearly mutative, the exhibition title is clearly program. Do you still remember February 2020, when the world went its by no means ideal, but nevertheless usual course? And then, in March 2020, when all certainty was suddenly shaken up as if a storm had hit the human world? It is precisely this metaphorical whirl that Silke Schwab has mutated in her works, it swirls in ever new facets and fragments along the wall of the gallery, marks a society in frenzied upheaval and climate change beckons us cheerfully from the reduced sequences of forms. I can only say extreme weather events. Even the most immaterial of the elements can become quite tangible. These flowing, meandering forms, which are composed of countless partly geometric, partly organic micro-forms like an organism, also have something immensely essential about them. They clench like fists, fan out like algae carpets; there are hardly any limits to the free play of associations here. Rather, in this large uncontrollable variable, the viewer is always given an extra chair in Silke Schwab's works.

But back to March 2020: the concise form of the corona virus itself, which, one must grudgingly admit, has an astonishing aesthetic appeal, indeed is downright cute with its little spike proteins, is also the formal starting point for a series of paper cuts entitled "In the Eye of the Hurricane." The virus has, in a manner befitting the species, mutated beyond recognition, the concise dissolves into sways and jags, amorphous intermediate stages that are pure motion, change, evolution. From omicron to omega it seems only a stone's throw, and we are more likely to run out of letters than to see these forms solidify. The art, however, does not warn, it only blithely mutates until the eyes of the hurricane and the viewer meet. Then the pictures invite you quite individually to start a dialogue.

Schwab's stop-motion film also takes a look into the aforementioned eye of the hurricane. By means of forms and moods alone, the film tells the story of a Covid sufferer, captures the pull of the infection in the image, the feverish, the rushing of the world in the silence of isolation. The film, still and silent, intertwines formally and intellectually with Barbara Karsch-Chaieb's delicate bamboo shelter: Shelter? Yes, please.

So what, then, is the world?

Well, it is in the dazzling nature of art that it does not answer, nor does it even necessarily want to create clarity. But it asks questions, precise or obscuring, aesthetic, human, melancholic, understanding, profound, questions that throw all knowledge overboard, and without them there can be no answers.