



Helge Emmaneel's painting practice

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As true and good as it would be to teach geography to children at an early age, in my judgement, however, one must begin with the nearest surroundings of formative nature.

Everything that makes an impression on their eyes and ears attracts attention: sun, moon and stars, fire, water, snow, ice, clouds, thunderstorms, animals, plants and stones.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
to Dietmar, July 1786

These lines from Goethe capture the essential fascination for clouds, water, nature and landscapes that has accompanied the artist Helge Emmaneel since childhood and, still to this day, is reflected in his works. His current artistic focus is particularly influenced by the theme of clouds.

The attention to the fleeting forms in the sky is shown in the paintings as a specific concept of nature – containing its untouchedness, its unspoilt state, as well as an uninfluenced- and unaffectedness.

Contrary to their intangibility, the clouds exhibit size and mass, take the stage, meteorologically point to the future, the present and the past, harboring a time factor in their becoming and passing that alludes to the extra-temporal.

Clouds exist as a concept for thousands of years and as a thing for millions upon millions of years. Their “materialization” itself – in the course of their forming and re-forming – paints



Cloudsketch n.2







moments of displacement, equally arranges zones of constancy and yet in parallel forms the gap and creates the vacuum onto conscious perception of an ancestral space that has just been filled.

What remains are not only impressions of fractures, of rough, torn and tattered states, but also perceptions of softness and grace, of movements in the light.

This itself changeable, the superimposing, the inward and outward movement

is illustrated by Emmaneel's classic brush-oil-canvas handling. This technique works with layers and produces effects such as depth and shimmer that themselves create an intense sense of space.

Emmaneel's paintings and drawings represent a different means of expression as well as a realignment of his artistic work since he switched from photography which for a long spell had been his favored medium.

The artist's handling of the coloring, however, challenges the viewer. His paintings are mostly characterised by a minimalist colour arc as if sequentially extending across his works.

This movement towards a certain colouring style originally is owed to a self-limitation to shades of grey from black and white mixtures. Blue and green colours were added to it at a later stage only, that together with the monochrome shades of grey, now form the reduced colour palette allowing Emmaneel to maintain the focus on form throughout.

In this way, he abstracts the concrete

observation of the clouds into a tenseness that imposes itself on the viewer's quick glance. Extended viewing of the grey tone nuances, however, manifests itself as a contemplative interaction of imago and figmentum.

In addition, the artistic procedure allows for a background to illuminate the light conditions within a cloud. The perception of what is happening there is made possible at the moment of becoming and passing, where for most viewers, in the brevity of the sight, nothing happens.

Emmaneel's conscious dividing of available space in the painting becomes evident from the arrangement of co-existing clouds, landscapes and a few selected motifs. Most notably landscapes that have not yet been cultivated are to be read like a pictorial statement.

Accordingly, nature is not viewed as a purely civilisational challenge. It rather is the almost reverent lingering in nature that generates the particular in the general.

Following the logic of reductionism, staged aeroplanes and houses convey in methodically consistent fashion the isolation that arises from the alienation and disenchantment of nature.

In this respect, the seemingly incongruous civilisational aspect contrasts with the ever-present conception of nature. Birds, on the other hand, symbolize being part of a natural environment that is hardly unspoilt anymore. They resonate in the recipient as his or her own naturalness and as an allegory for freedom of movement.

Finally, the artist deals with the mi-



Cloudsketch n.5







cro- and macro structures of what makes clouds consistent in a way that is similar to the application of the colour scheme. Single drops of water, or those being reflected whilst moving, exemplify the small in the large, when behind the cloud's substance the cloud itself, as a backdrop, is unfolding an ensemble of dimensions and in doing so noting the beauty of the ephemeral - puddle mirrors, haze vapours, rain formations, force of water, sea drift, wind wanderings, aerial scenes, impressions of cold and warmth as well as streams of light and shadows:

Helge Emmaneel's paintings are visible sojourns located in clouds.



