



Yves Netzhammer
«Die Pflege der Argumente»
March, 3 - April 14, 2018

The art of Yves Netzhammer (born in 1970, lives and works in Zürich) develops on the basis of a computer generated visual world that the artist inserts into various contexts. The cast, backdrop, and decoration of this universe of the artist's own creation are easily recognizable. They combine drawing, sculpture, and animation in expansive installations, but the individual works also come together to form an overall oeuvre that has been expanding for nearly two decades now. A constant in his work is the distanced artificiality of the strangely remote creatures and endless landscapes. If, in his earlier work, the individual media could often be encountered individually, the more recent works are characterized by an almost total interpenetration of the various media with one another. The link to real space in particular has gained in importance in the form of site-specific, sometimes monumental installations.

For his presentation at Galerie Mark Müller, Yves Netzhammer turns the proportions around and dedicates himself to the subject of the miniature. He places three objects made of chromed steel on pedestals, objects that embody trees in miniature form: a fruit tree, a shrub, and finally a short plant with an expansive crown, which is most reminiscent of the bonsai we are otherwise familiar with, the ultimate in miniature plants. The bars not only represent a drawing in space, but cast shadows on the opposite wall due to the video projection just next to it. In the best constructivist fashion, they generate a geometric segmentation in which the events of three animated films play out, all *en miniature*, of course. Trees and plants emerge in Netzhammer's works again and again. But, as in the installation *Die Subjektivierung der Wiederholung, Projekt B* (2007) at Kunstmuseum Bern, if the tree is amplified by way of mirror-reflections to the several dimensions, indeed the universal, here the miniaturized tree shape is more like an experimental set up or a demonstration. It frames the three films with different content, providing, if you will, the respective narrative with a biological-botanical syntax.

Screened in a vertical format, the film (12:50 minutes, loop) projected through the fruit tree deals with concepts like the body or embodiment. The main character is a 3D humanoid figure without gender or face with which Netzhammer has been working for many years now. It moves, seen from various perspectives, through the geometrical pattern of branches that the tree casts against the wall. Burdened with a hole in its back, several unsettling things happen to the figure: it multiplies, but then disintegrates into many parts; bodies fuse and fragment. There is but a fine line between the intact and the injured body, between

sexuality and violence, between life and death. The gnarly bonsai in turn creates a grid structure that is horizontal in format and is used by two monkeys in the first scene as a jungle gym. This film (10:20 minutes, loop) deals with the relationship between animal and human being. The black monkey is contrasted with the white human figure. From the mimicry of anthropomorphic traits to mutual fusion, various degrees of interaction are illustrated between the two beings. In the process, the power and control function of the human being is critically questioned vis-à-vis the inferior, stereotypically black animal. The third film (13:50 min., loop), which plays out in the shadows cast by the thin shrub, deals with the subject of metamorphosis. A luxury apartment from an interior design magazine transforms together with its residents, and becomes—without a single cut, as is only possible in animation—a dingy dormitory; the close-up of several snails in intact nature in contrast moves seamlessly into a nuclear power plant. Mutations are central for Netzhammer's work. Shaped by the ambiguity of signs, none of his images are stable. Forms, gestures, and motifs are constantly overlapping, transforming, or in motion. The enduring mutation of the motifs creates a fragmentary image of reality and stands for the anti-coherence of things that Netzhammer wants to express in his works.

The miniature trees as an aid to projection can also be discussed in relationship to the question of proportion. The issue is raised in several ways: in the animations themselves between the fields sketched out by the shades of the branches, between object and animation, and finally in relationship of the individual arrangement in the exhibition space. By changing the usual proportions, shifts in meaning become manifest, as the example of the bonsai shows quite nicely. This form of garden art from Asia, now widespread around the world, focuses on hindering plant growth. By way of elaborate artificial measures, the shape of the plant is controlled. According to Chinese tradition, someone who has successfully grown a bonsai plant according to all rules of the art should have no worries about the state of his soul. This culturally meaningful praxis finds an echo in Netzhammer, who feels himself drawn to Far Eastern thought. On the surface, the time-consuming creation of the image in the medium of digital animation is something that demands great exactitude and care. But also the way in which Netzhammer cultivates narratives, growing them carefully from a basic idea, precisely enhances them and developing them further, has a great deal to do with mindfulness and maintenance, as echoed in the title of the exhibition. Netzhammer engages in *Die Pflege der Argumente* (Maintaining Arguments) not least through the formal and thematic continuity of his works, in which social, ethical, and political issues are taken up again and again as a subtext and discussed—sometimes in a playful, charming light, but also in a profound and serious way.

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