

“21”

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For years Julie Monaco has worked with constructions. Analytical considerations regarding analog and digital models are the basis for her work. Fascinating pictures are the result of this research. Initially they presented landscapes with a classical appearance, and they became increasingly abstract only by way of repeated interventions. This is where the deconstruction of the constructions sets in. Let us begin with her constructions: When looking at the surface, Julie Monaco seems to compose works.

Landscape pictures, especially views of the sea that could not be anymore classical, with low-lying horizons, suggest an endless expanse. Sometimes the sea is leaden and motionless; sometimes the onlooker sees stormy and lashing waves, with brilliant cloud formations building up against the sky. The onlooker's viewpoint is in different places – sometimes very high, sometimes deep below, so that you can almost smell the water. Dutch landscape painters of the 17th century, such as Van Goyen or Ruisdael, had a deep impact on this theme, the stretched, cinemascope-like format that Julie Monaco uses mainly reinforces this impression. Altogether, a gloomy, eerie atmosphere prevails. In spite of the perfect make-believe, certain doubts linger – something about these powerful sea views is undefined and unique. The lighting is unrealistic; light and dark are arranged in such an extraordinary fashion, as nature would never be able to achieve. The line on the horizon is too sharp, the clouds are too low, the waves have a suspicious glitter, ... At first sight, the sepia color of the pictures is a reference to photography - of the kind that we no longer know today – a reference therefore to things long gone by, but if we search the repositories of our minds, this does not take us any further. These are rather visionary images that may perhaps give a foreboding of things to come. The suggestion – the construction – is too perfect.

With her series of pictures cs_0 Julie Monaco produced an artificial, abstract reality. The wild romanticism of nature was produced in purely digital form by means of a computation process. A number, a numeric code, is her starting point. Neither concrete models such as

photographs or scans were used to produce the image; nor were the images generated from any real image. Software tools were used to produce the landscape pictures. For these several computer programs were used to define selection and parameters. Rendering was used to visualize the three-dimensional model that was created with this approach. In other words, computer-assisted processes (algorithms) provided the optical upgrading.

No matter how diametrically opposed the presentation (the computed image) and the presented objects (nature) appear to be, there is a concrete analogy between these two media: the fractal, which is the smallest common denominator, combines computer technology and nature. In 1975 Benoît Mandelbrot made a momentous observation, namely that “clouds are not spheres, and mountains are not cones“. This is why the geometrical figures that were used in the past were much too imprecise to describe them. A mountain should therefore be described by one dimension, which is not a whole number but a fractal (Latin: fractus = broken). In order to overcome this deficit, Mandelbrot assigned all figures of broken dimension to the species of fractals. In nature, fractals are created by the repeated application of a geometrical principle, in computer technology by iteration (feedback) of a mathematical equation. Fractal mathematics is therefore mainly used when generating pictures. As was mentioned before, fractals can reproduce natural phenomena true to nature. This is why fractal geometry is particularly suited to generate clouds, mountains, trees and ocean surfaces.

Julie Monaco uses and controls the potential offered by computer technology in an ideal fashion and immediately transposes it into works of art, in a logical and precise manner. In doing so, she conscientiously applies paradigmatic categories of art history (window motifs, canvass formats, using the color sepia). With that she enters into a dialogue with a series of masterpieces such, for example, the sea views of Hiroshi Sugimoto. Just like the wide-screen format of cinema films the data volume was visualized on a format ratio of 16/9, which created delusion and a fictitious space in an optimum fashion. cs_0 und cs_1 were like film stills

from an animation and suggested a motion within the construction, with their dynamic sequence of subjects, like skies, clouds and water texture, and created a time delay in both directions of the picture. Julie Monaco demonstrated her interest in the analysis of systematic possibilities already in her earlier works, for example in *basic_box* dated 2000/2001, in which she looked at the variations of a box in a three-dimensional (computer) space. With the series *cs_0* the result of a systematic (computing) process was visualized for the first time.

In these synthetic pictures Julie Monaco also puts nature before our eyes as the desired places of our recollections. According to Jacques Le Goff the remembered past is always a reconstructed past. In this case it was “reconstructed” quite specifically.

Digital revision I

The initial repertoire of sea views was expanded by that of the mountain landscapes. However, these are similarly enigmatic in effect; yet, they appear to be much more abstract, on account of the more pronounced ruptures and fissures in their construction. Occasionally, it is not clear whether the surfaces in the pictures are solid or liquid matter, as the synthetic character is much stronger. This indifferent state is shown in its extreme in the very atmospheric pictures of clouds. Here, the clearly defined horizon has been abandoned, and a kind of state of suspension has been achieved. Light and dark determine themselves.

Up to that point elements like water, air or earth clearly dominated Julie Monaco's world of pictures. In her most recent works a fourth, less clearly defined pictorial element is added, which may be associated with fire, on account of its dynamic character. The Greek philosophers of nature (ever since Empedocles) regarded earth, fire, water and air as the basis for our real world, and in the works of Julie Monaco these are the basic, creative elements. She now takes more account of the abstract reality by giving ample scope to this fourth element. Dynamic whirls force their way between onlooker and constructed landscape and leave behind a devastated, chaotic impression. These whirls scatter over the landscapes like cosmic explosions. The perspective and the depth in space are superposed by this extensive fire. Informalisms interfere with shaped objects, the construction becomes deconstructed. A non-computed and non-computable element is put in juxtaposition to – one is inclined to say thrown against – the controllable and controlled computing process. The extrapolated picture is exposed to a designed attempt at interference, and the handwriting of the artist appears in the picture for the first time, because the whirls are of analog origin.

They are created by hand using sponges and/or wide brushes, which creates a collage-like combination with the digital material of the picture. The highly artificial character – that refers to nature and suggests nature – is put in contrast to nature as such, namely the dynamic, creative nature of the artist. The analogy of *natura naturans* (creative nature) and *natura naturata* (created nature) comes to one's mind, although there is no room to discuss the complex nature of this subject matter.

Digital revision II

The need to be able to interfere with the creative process directly – and not only via the keyboard and again via the keyboard – and to operate as more than a kind of controller of a process that is initiated once and totally rationalized, this is the subject of “line buildings”. In these works several drawings are used as a point of departure for a digital confusion of lines. By using one pen, two to three lines are drawn by hand into a 3D program, and by combining the lines, which the computer calculates, a chaos-like state is simulated. The quite conscientious, analog interference with the orderly world of fractals is a dramatic change of direction in the work of Julie Monaco. The direct intervention by the drawing hand breaks open the corset of fractals that has become too tight. Thus there is not only a formal new orientation – according to the computed landscapes – but the new thinking of a process that can be calculated becomes manifest. The escape from the endless loop has been achieved.

These “line buildings” are not merely two-dimensional but three-dimensional structures, which come about by the different width of the lines. In addition, the hand-drawn lines are adjusted to rendered lines, so that the difference between analog and digital can no longer be discerned – and yet, it is precisely this duality that is the constituent element of “line buildings”. Analog and digital drawings thus enter into a dialogue that can no longer be separated in visual terms on the underlying surface (hand-made paper). The dynamics of the hand drawing initiates a process that aims at accelerating the object on the picture. In this purely graphic solution, form and substance are identical, they are molten into a cosmic bundle, yet, they are basically built on their dual character.

While it was possible to understand the earlier works of Julie Monaco as showing a past that was remembered and reconstructed by means of digital technology, her new pictures clearly point to a visionary, truly chaotic future, in spite of the traditional, analog intervention by means of hand-drawing.