

Rainer Fest – The hard is overcome

A stone like the tableau of a mountain with a small hut in the middle of a watercourse. This may be an apt description of one of Rainer Fest's fountains, or rather water sculptures, if merely viewed on a scale-distorting photograph.

When facing the object itself, the view becomes more abstract: a roughly chiselled, light matte stone surface with shining, smooth and polished one-piece elements, whose one side seems to be negative, a hole, while the other side appears as a positive, three-dimensional element, with both sides being linked by the water springing forth from the stone and slowly running over the surface.

Positive – negative; matte – shining; hard – soft, solid – liquid; static – flowing and moved; light – dark: these are the contrasts the work is composed of. Architecture, landscape, and philosophical concepts come to mind more readily than thinking of traditional sculpture. However, we are still dealing with traditional sculpture, even though it possesses a special gift for lending metaphysical profoundness to the materials employed.

Rather than being attracted and affected by the house-like shape of the positive – negative object, the river-like form of the watercourse, or the mountainous appearance of the stone, viewers will be touched by perceiving the elemental nature of the flowing water, the process of coming into being and passing away, the perennial recurrence of things never alike.

For all their three-dimensional presence, these plain crystalline objects reflect a particular meditative substance. Made from basalt columns or stones by using the natural fractures produced by water veins and lime deposits, these sculptures keep the originality of the material and its formation.

The contrast of natural stone, or erratic boulders, to mechanical processing or strict artistic arrangement creates tension in space, i.e. in real space as well as in its abstract dimension. For instance, the spiral arrangement of Berlin granite pavement slabs, which – set up in a circle and starting from an upright position – gradually get closer to the ground at precisely defined angles, prompts a variety of associations ranging from Stonehenge, cosmic spiral nebulae and water eddies to alpha and omega, creation and passing, death and life.

Rainer Fest never deals with mere aesthetics, his work is aimed at philosophical concepts which almost effortlessly communicate to attentive viewers. Water plays a crucial role in this context.

Even to Thales, a predecessor of Sokrates, the element of water already seemed to be of special significance so that he called it the primary material of which the world is composed. In the world of today, natural science has long since defeated that theory. Nonetheless, water has kept its mystical attributes, as is proven by the great number of powerful myths still associated with it.

While Fest's fountain sculptures give expression to a soothing „everything flows“, they also show the disturbing effects created by the eternal non-likeness of that flowing, by its inherent chaos.

And finally, a moral component can also be found. In „The coming into being of the book Tao Te King; on Lao Tse's way into emigration“ Bert Brecht has the boy who leads Lao Tse's ox to the customs collector comment on his master's philosophy:

„The soft water always defeats the hard stone, you understand: the hard is overcome.“

Ursula Prinz