

Archetypes of space

„While stone is without doubt the least discussed manifestation of eternity, it is certainly the most provable one. Our buildings rise on it, and our thunderstorms strike by it.“ (1)

In stone, eternity plays with time. It is already there when touched by the artist, and it continues to exist when the artist finishes his work. As with all elements of nature, stone is exposed to the effects of time; its durability, however, is greater than that of organic life. Even though stones are of finite nature too, man sees an element of eternity in them.

Stone is the material of the sculptor Rainer Fest. His works deal with its surface and toughness, the time it has accumulated, the erosion it is subject to, and the artistic process that shapes it.

Rainer Fest's approach to stone is characterised by circumspection and precaution. His interventions are often reduced to a minimum, but by their very accuracy offer a glimpse of human and cosmic truth. No matter if Rainer Fest works erratic boulders from Glashütte, his adopted hometown in Pomerania, or basalt or granite, he always manages to comprehend and visualise the inherent characteristics of the stone as a working basis. The artist uses the geological factuality written into the stone, i.e. traces of pressure and erosion, as a starting point for his work. By leaving the stone in its place, limiting the interventions to a minimum, and skilfully refraining from manual processing, the stones actually become alive and transparent, and start telling stories – of what they are, and what we are.

When understanding the language of Rainer Fest's sculptures in that way, the subject matter of his work becomes apparent: the fact of being human, the endeavours to become human, and the dangers associated with it. In stone, transcendence and cosmos can thus be experienced. Stone reveals spiritual concepts in the form of model-like small objects and large, weighty sculptures.

Time and again, Rainer Fest's works show houses, stairways and other architectural elements that grow out of the stone, crown it, disappear into it in the form of stairways, or are embedded as negative shapes. Even in his small sculptures, Rainer Fest creates greatness: stairways or houses – though of small size – assume monumental proportions, for they are imago and concept of entirety. The houses he carves out of the stone – accurately describing their forms through sculptural means and polishing their surfaces – appear to be models of cognition in the tangible presence of the stone. The stone is the object for these houses, stairways and their negatives, as a microcosmic particle of the earth as a geological whole as well as macrocosmic place, landscape or environment.

These forms, already in hidden existence before the sculptor took up work, originate from the stone and, while remaining an immanent part in the wake of the artistic process, also become extraneous. They are expression and proof of culture and its efforts and attempts to comprehend nature and the universe.

While Rainer Fest's key elements, the houses or stairways, are components of the stone, they are at the same time in the process of detachment: they are a manifestation of man and his culture, which is based on nature – a nature, however, that can only be experienced through cultural activity.

The houses and stairways in Rainer Fest's work are archetypal symbols of man's need to settle down, to have a home, to find his way home, to come home – to find himself. Ultimately, however, this also means being in a space of time, being in the time of the stone, immersing in the stone, and leaving time.

The concept suggested in Rainer Fest's work contradicts in many respects the notions of a giddy-paced and short-winded age which responds with estrangement and insecurity to thoughts of the unity of man, nature and cosmos. The ideas expressed in his works are tangent to mythical concepts of being human – that is a form of existence before and beyond historic dimensions. In this context, myth means closeness to the origin and a bond between man, nature and cult. The works of artists like Rainer Fest succeed in communicating with the origin. To him, art is subject and level of mediation in public life, and equally so, a process taking place in obscurity. Both areas are inherent domains of art, and they are at the heart of Rainer Fest's creative activities.

He creates sculptures for public areas – such as the large-sized sculpture for the Konrad-Zuse-Institut für Informationstechnologie, Berlin – as well as small-sized works, which are either finished directly at the place of discovery of the stone or boulder, or created in his studio.

A key element of many of his works is running water. As a flowing prime element and symbol of life, water runs over a throne sculpture or washes around a house, thereby questioning and jeopardising its firm stand. The water adds elements of movement and light to the sculpture. With water continuously working and permanently changing the stone, another paradigm enters the work and working method. The static nature of the stones is disturbed by movement – i.e. time passing by in a perceivable manner –, while light reflected by the water changes their surfaces, and thus the way the sculpture is seen. Also, the water gives back sound to the otherwise mute stone.

Stone, water, light, sound and archaic architectural forms are the basis of Rainer Fest's sculptural work. In his works, nature and culture merge into a unity which does not deny, however, the far-reaching differences between both areas. The artist stands in the circle his work has described.

He is the centre of his world. Edmond Jabes' comment on physical objects is true both of him and his works: „Everything is connected to everything. Each thing has its counterpart. Man – the faith of man; war – the feast, the dance of the insect – the unmoving stone. The rule of the play is the rule of the universe.“ (2)

(1) Edmond Jabes, *Es nimmt seinen Lauf*, Frankfurt/Main 1981, p. 30

(2) *Ibid.* P. 38

