

Rainer Fest's sculptures are unusual in character. Within the multiple contexts of contemporary artistic expression they occupy a very singular position, on ground that has been won from personal experiences, rather than standing in debt to art-historical knowledge and least of all to an orientation towards the market.

Rainer Fest is one of those solitary artists who work from an inner passion which is spiritual in nature – if we conceive of the spirit as a psychological force, drawing sustenance from intellect and emotion in equal measure. Both are, of course, affected by social environment – this, however, does not have to be an artistic environment in order to give rise to art. A work of art, if it is sincere and of good quality, is always also authentic, i.e. not dependent on other artworks. This means that the impetus leading us to produce and to interact with art is a primarily human one: the age-old need for transcendence, felt by a creature that is conscious of death.

Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that Rainer Fest's works are not merely objects intended to gratify good taste, though they may indeed do this as objects of beauty - but first and foremost they are objects of spiritual use. This use does indeed take place – and this is intended by the aesthetic element of his work – cautiously and at a measured pace: we must take time, must be at peace in the true sense of the word, in order to engage fully with this artist's work.

In a room inhabited by Rainer Fest's work, two things immediately catch the eye. For one thing, the sound and thorough craftsmanship with which everything is made, and for another, the enigmatic combination of natural and architectural form, which delivers an emotional effect before we are able to comprehend its cause.

A closer approach to his works, whether sculptures, objects, collages or drawings, reveals how much of their power is due to the material, their substance as created by geological growth, or by individual or industrial manufacture. Rainer Fest succeeds in expressing this "growth into being" as a sense of history: he confronts the material structure with a sparing application of workmanship, which stands in pointed contrast to it and thus emphasises its unique characteristics. Essentially, his manner of using stone or wood or paper always includes a narrative component, acting as impetus for the details of history divulged by the material.

One has the impression that the stories pursued by Rainer Fest are often rooted in childhood – the artist's individual childhood as well as that of the human species. One of the most elementary children's games, given the chance, is to play freely with earth and water or with building blocks, creating landscapes and architectures – a habitat at once real and fanciful, brought into the world by magical means. In any case it is a space created for the spirit – the childlike spirit, which would like the world to be different from the way in which it intrudes upon us, and is still close to a mythical spirit of god or the gods – that part of the Self which is projected into the universal, and has ever been a powerful impetus commanding humans to create habitations for it. It is not the sense of physical shelter which Rainer Fest evokes in the ever recurring cipher of a house, the core motif of his sculptures. It is rather that the prominences and recesses in the stone, which take the form of a house, are centres of tension in the artistic form, intersections of movements inherent in the stone and congealed into crystals, an assertion of cultic relevance from below the surface – a sanctum, the site of mysteries.

This also applies to the austere sculptures in wood, which are not so much dwellings in themselves as requisites for a sense of habitation. One is involuntarily reminded of the sanctuaries of ancient cultures, in prehistoric Europe and precolumbian America, which are built below ground - within the bedrock, the flesh of the primal mother. The reverence for stone as a material, for its age is first and foremost a reverence for the sources of one's own life, the flesh of the mother, the silent and decidedly ineloquent female powers of creation. It is through no coincidence that Rainer Fest is most interested in the remains of female cults in the ancient monuments within the landscapes of Europe. His study of goddess-figures - idols such as the statues he discovered in Sicily and defined as "pre-madonnas" are important in this connection.

With regard to the history of religions, it is precisely this point of transition from the cult of the Female to the christian paternal God – the reversal of signifiers and premises for the interpretation of life - which preoccupies Rainer Fest as an artist and as a human being: a transition as dramatic as it is mysterious, comparable to a natural disaster such as the reversal of the poles in the history of the planet. If we speak of stone as bearing witness, it is always addressed with dual purpose in the works of Rainer Fest: in the historical sense, if stone stores the planet's history in a way that is comprehensible to the inquisitive human gaze, and in the mythical sense, since stone has retained a significance as part of the substance of the Earth, an almost fleshly substance from the body of the primal mother, which is analogous to the Host as the flesh of God in christian religion.

The handling of stone, of naturally-grown substance per se, transformed by the sculptor Rainer Fest ultimately has an erotic, even caressing aspect - a vital source of his interaction with the material. With this view, it becomes clear why Rainer Fest uses water and light in particular, as sculptural materials in addition to stone, wood and clay. He is concerned with far more than mere formal polarisations: water and also light are both real and mythical elements of life, parts of the natural landscape, determining the habitus of the planet and stimulating its fertility.

Polarisation - this essential issue appears to grow from a form of horror for Rainer Fest: horror of the arbitrariness and force of a reversal of opposites, which are indeed part of the inscrutabilities of nature and of the human soul. As well as in his sculptures, Rainer Fest deals explicitly with this subject in collages, drawings and, in an only seemingly peripheral way, in his book objects - these are therefore a significant part of the exhibition, illuminating the intellectual world of the artist. Rainer Fest examines how positive and negative forms give rise to one another, how they interlock and authenticate one another - how in consequence, light and dark, solid and void, the prominent and the sunken, compact and ephemeral matter are related to one another, and how all of this together forms something like a continuous text.

These are examinations carried out with precision, but – in an experimental demonstration – they are still more playful than can be called scientific. They are playful in the sense that elementary insights are intuitively transported through play.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, we would not be entirely wrong in discovering correspondences between the sculptures of Rainer Fest and those small models of the world, the building-block architectures and landscapes created in our own nurseries.

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