



### **Ilsabe Schülke: Introduction to the exhibition ,Gabriele Koepe – Drawings‘**

Our new exhibition of large-format drawings by Gabriele Koepe follows on from three exhibitions at this venue: the large-format drawings in 2022, "Memento mori" in 2012 and "Über das Sonnenlicht auf dem Fußboden" in 1999. These references to Gabriele Koepe's works, to the unusually large format of her finely structured drawings, to a picture title such as "Memento" or the recurring motif of the floor - however, this is only an introduction to her differentiated and far-reaching work. And so I approach her work from different angles.

There are aerial photographs of ground plans of southern Italian cities that were destroyed by earthquakes in the 17th century and rebuilt according to plan, but with a peculiar, equally planned disruption of the ground plans. Koepe's work "Exeunt" has an astonishingly similar surface structure. It goes back to her photograph of a scratched stage floor, the title of the picture to a Shakespearean stage direction, "people leave the stage" (literally "they go out"). "Exeunt" - "Exodus" - an obvious association? This drawing is one of four large works created in 2022. In terms of form and motif, it correlates with the last, seventh work, which is still in the making on the invitation card.

The basis and starting point of her works are photographs that Gabriele Koepe takes on her travels, unspectacular snapshots of objects and spaces in which people are absent, no longer present: Utensils in the bathroom of a hotel, an abandoned bed, a travel bag on a shelf, hanging laundry on a street in India, a Moroccan motorway café with the beautiful name "Oasis".

You enter the empty café, the television is on, the chairs without people who have left or might come. From the cropped wicker chair at the entrance, our gaze is drawn across the group of chairs into the background, where the image of the chair is lost, blurred. This part of the interior is framed once again by the ceiling and supporting beams, so that we can take a closer look and recognise the inventory, as a kind of inference from the chair objects in the entrance. Here we see the first chair only in the section and because the structure of the wickerwork with its light-shadow effect is so precisely worked out, we complete the objects, even beyond the

picture frame and into the depth of the room.

Layers of perception and sensation are created between the concrete foreground and the diffuse background. The concrete view on entering the café gradually changes into an associative, intellectual reception.

I can't get Lonesco's "chairs" out of my mind.

After this formal digression, I would like to ask what span lies between the photographic motif and the artefact of the large-format drawing and how does the artist transform an actually trivial, yet aesthetically pre-formulated snapshot into the quality of a beautiful picture?

The formal content of the large composition is based on a photographic motif that aroused the artist's interest: Laundry in a field in India, hung on lines between racks, a grassy ground with rail-like shadow lines, a sky in which clouds drift over the blowing laundry.

In the drawing "Veli Junction" - Veli, the name of an Indian neighbourhood - the spatial and the object-like merge into one another, almost merging. Divided into three pictorial levels, the elements of the centre zone with their triangular wooden stakes and the more organic, corporeal pieces of clothing find their respective counterparts. The elongated triangles of the rail-like shadow lines in the ground run out of the picture and emphasise the detail; the structure of the grassy ground already indicates their course. The shape and direction of the drifting clouds correspond with the blowing laundry. Whilst the plasticity of the laundry diminishes towards the depth of the picture, the clouds move towards the viewer, almost over his head.

According to the artist, she has changed the sky with clouds. The result is a complex pictorial arrangement with three overlapping levels.

How artistic this pictorial concept is and how finely the details are worked out.

Gabriele Koeppel effortlessly varies the material nature of things: an abandoned bed is the stimulus for a study of folds that traces body shapes and transitions from the realistic function of bed and cloth into a formal structure. The marvellous garment studies of Baroque painters come to mind in view of Koeppel's graphic brilliance and the moving composition of abstract material elements in the drawing "Budapest". This work, the first in the series of seven drawings on show, initially appears to be an introduction to the theme of travelling, stations, sojourns; it does not show people, but rather their absence. It is reduced to a dominant object, a bed that has just been abandoned. Thus the viewer's attention is initially directed towards its artistic representation, the graphic and formal means of its realisation. However, intelligent references follow: where does the picture, the drawing, the depicted reality take me, into my associations, memories, ideas, imaginations? Artistic equivalents, literary parallels emerge, Handtke's "Inner World of the Outer World of the Inner World", Enzensberger's volume of poetry "The Fury of Disappearance"

I look at a travelling bag in its object-like quality, how its representational meaning is gradually reinterpreted in the abstract chiaroscuro values of a drawing. The decidedly flat, almost monochrome background reinforces the tendency towards abstraction of the representational in this work entitled "Memento", which may denote a moment, a memory or a reminder. In this compositionally rigorous work, Koeppel sets two contrasting pictorial elements in relation to each other: the surface of the wall and the plasticity of the bag. This contrast is very finely balanced. It seems almost playful how the main motif is continued in plastic, non-representational detail forms.

In the geometrised space of a bathroom in a hotel "Sandouli" - the title of the work - reflections and doublings expand the pictorial space. In the mirror on the left-hand side of the picture, we see a hanging garment that is not actually visible in the picture, but which leads out of the picture into the viewer's real surroundings through the reflection. We perceive a sequence of diminishing levels of reality. In this work, too, the representational meaning is lost because the objects are doubled and multiplied in the space of the bathroom in which they are located, as in a hall of mirrors.

Here too, as in the café or on the street, a place without people. Places without their inhabitants ultimately describe the trauma of placelessness. An air of melancholy pervades lonely places and rooms. With the greatest possible objectivity and neutralised representation, there is a layer between the representation itself and something behind it.

"Beauty is a strange kind of phantom pain The feeling of being connected to and separated from something that one has never possessed A razor-sharp feeling of distance... "\*)

The work "Tivoli" mentioned at the beginning, still "work in progress" on the invitation card, now hangs as an artefact in our exhibition - a floor surface, not scratched, but gridded by a cobblestone pavement, a puddle in which the sun and clouds are reflected.

If we take another look at the invitation card, it not only shows how the last work to date was created; it also shows the artist, both in the pictorial space and in the unmarked exterior space. The blurring of disappearance is repeated. For us as viewers, the finished drawing shows the indirect representation of a plane outside the picture, clouds and sun as mirrored reality. The rather organic forms of puddle and clouds are brought into a beautiful contrast with the geometricised pavement that swings out of the picture. The work "Tivoli" combines some of the above-mentioned aesthetic, artistic elements of the other works and, last but not least, its beauty and refractions bear comparison with a paradisiacal Indian landscape in a gold frame.

One final remark: G.K. said that she scribbles on paper and showed us one plastic bag per drawing, filled with the spiralling waste from sharpened pencils.

05.05.2024

\*) John von Düffel, Das Wenige und das Wesentliche – Ein Stundenbuch, 2022