



Weekendhäuser für Seelen, Objekte aus Ton, 1985–86
Weekend Houses for Souls, clay objects

TURNING PAGES

Diane Shooman

In a recent visit to Renate Kordon’s studio, she showed me a three-dimensional structure she had started to build, an intriguing place—many-storied, and nothing squared off, with things that tilt and support and hold, and things that fly; open, transparent, each part visible to the others. Renate said: “It’s a model of my book.” I laughed. Leave it to Renate Kordon to turn to one medium to reveal the secret soul of another. This is, after all, a 60th birthday book, an autobiography, a self-portrait, illustrating this life so far through the art it has inspired.

Before it is possible to bring myriad multi-medial works—drawings, objects, films, projections, public sculptures—onto paper and into a page-by-page sequence, first one would be overwhelmed, flooded by a sea of images. Then the works start floating toward each other, flocking together, congregating and re-congregating, gregarious as they are, seeking each other’s society and finding communal connections.

One has to build them an imaginary space where they can all be seen, with the threads and patterns that link them across themes, materials, genres and time, dancing an intricate dance where everything touches everything else at least once, before they each float onto one of many possible positions on paper, some inner logic of that celestial dance flowing into the linearity of page upon page.

As an architecture student, Renate Kordon inclined more to two-dimensional renderings of her ideas than three-dimensional realizations. She found that casting off an external concrete dimension cleared the way for an imaginative inner one. Conjuring a dimension for the imagination and the soul could be said to be the primary impulse in all of Renate Kordon’s work.

While some of us are preoccupied with housing and styling our mortal frames, Renate Kordon tosses our dresses upward to suspend them in an aerial dream of dancing flight (*Haute Couture*, 2006), and builds *Weekend Houses for Souls* for soulmates such as Franz Kafka and Camille Claudel (1985–86) of clay malleable enough to take on improbable shapes, but solidifying into something you can count on. If you had the fortune to know Renate in the mid-1980s, it is likely that she will have drawn a portrait of your ‘soular’ energy (*Soul-Energy Portraits, Rome*, 1986). Instead of buying a souvenir to take home as a memory of a beloved place and experience, Renate

pockets the whole city by capturing its spirit on one page (*Paris auf Papier*, 1980–81; *Detroit*, 1982).

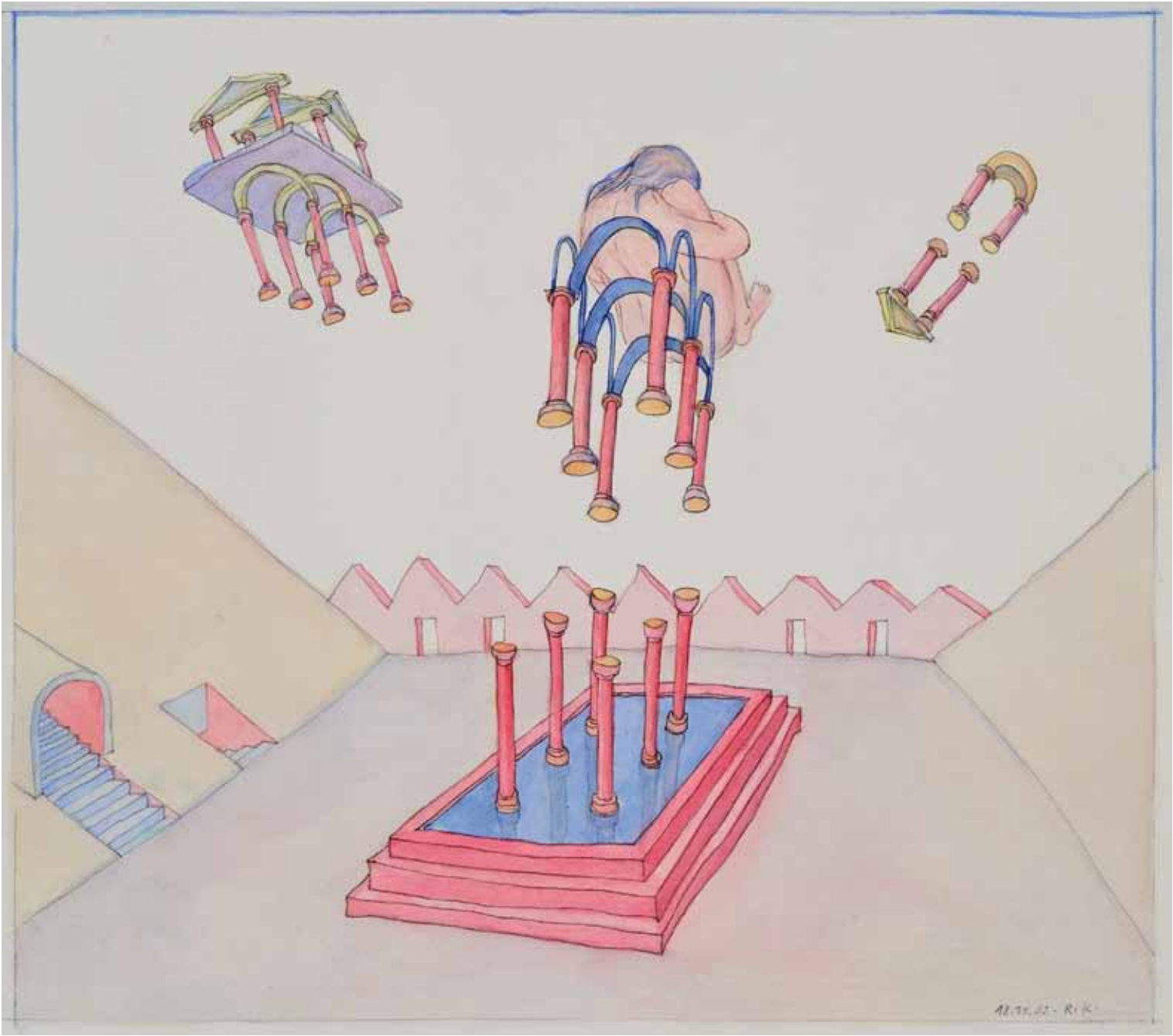
Spirals, labyrinths, space and time travel, the dance, the thread that holds everything together, that runs throughout, that shows the way: for Ariadne and her red thread that guides through the unfathomable labyrinth, there are drawings of multi-layered dance spaces, flight lift-off pads from antiquity (*Where Ariadne Dances*, 1982). In case you feel left out, you can join Renate Kordon on a space walk in her studio with the full wall tableau *Walking on my Spaceship* (steel wire wall drawing, 2001). Thoughtful as she is, Kordon also radiates *White Music* (2006) for all of her stellar companions in the form of a steel wire sculpture covered in illuminative retroflective material.

From the drawings she did as a child to her present on-going work, Renate Kordon has spent nearly 60 years in the split second of transformation, the magic power of art. Renate’s work ‘tricks’ the eye, not into seeing optical illusions, but into seeing hidden potential.

Moving, then, from the material permanence of the building medium to the substanceless ephemerality of projected light was a way for Renate to visualize the invisible, to reflect on the inner lives of things. The word ‘animation’ can be translated in German as ‘Beseelung’, breathing the soul into the inanimate.

In her earliest film work, Renate Kordon places one of film’s greatest unacknowledged actors in the limelight, namely time. In just a moment (*Augenblicke*, 1979), the content of the film is the time the viewer invests in it, with no return. *Daily Drawings* (1980) is a speedy leaf-through of Renate Kordon’s drawings over a five-year period, ‘sketched’ by the camera in 3 minutes. This kind of autobiographical portraiture operates on an essential paradox: movement reveals development, but at high velocity, simultaneity—revealing repetition—is almost achieved. Do we progress with time, or as it moves us on, do we, paradoxically, become more fixed? The possibilities for transformation—of even the most resistant clay—shape both the form and content of Kordon’s work (*Tonfilm*, 1986).

In her first longer animated film, *Hors d’Œuvre*, (1981), a book ‘reads’ itself as the modest black line denoting it spins a fantastic ‘yarn’ of a surprising sequence of ‘characters’. The sense of wonder at metamorphosis enacted by invisible forces also drew Renate Kordon to ritual, which she explores in drawings and films such as *Colourful Blood* (1985).



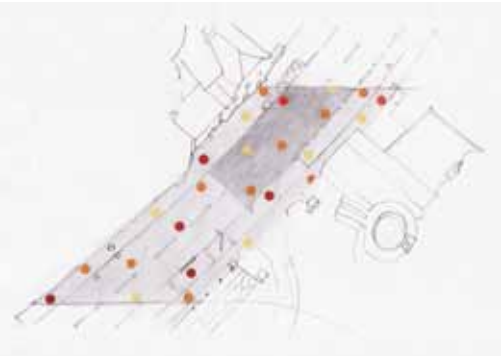
Aus der Aquarell-Reihe *Tanzplätze für Ariadne*, 1982
From the watercolour series *Where Ariadne Dances*

Personality patterns are played out as more than mere psychosomatic rashes, painted shot for shot onto the skin. Do we make our marks, or do they make us? Aren’t our habits as ingrained as the grooves of our thumbprints? Don’t they claim us for their own as much as our tribes claim us with their markings (be it a cipher painted on our foreheads or an alligator sewn onto our sweaters)? In search of illumination, Kordon gives the leading role to the other invisible actor, namely light itself. Cut-out and layering techniques with glass plate, paper and color transparencies were used for *Trickptychon* (1987), which plays as a three-part wall projection of stellar bodies in motion with

no beginning and no end. On the junctured walls, the flitting images assume bodily form, and the room radiates with celestial spirit. In the installations that follow, the human figure also appears as a heavenly (no)body.

Renate Kordon has subsumed the material world into celluloid to subject it to the transforming forces of film. In the commissions Kordon has won for public sculpture, she has set the inner workings of film into play in the material sphere. On the main street of Schottwien, colorful dots in the pavement mark the motions of the sun on the shadow surfaces cast by the overhead highway bridge, to create a *Sundial of*

the Seasons (1993/2008). Drivers approaching the Austrian/Slovenian border crossing are welcomed by a colorful whirl of cut-out sun wheels spinning overhead along a 76-meter metal trajectory (*Lichtspiel Spielfeld* 1989/91). The sensation of depth changing through time, causing a visual interplay between the cut-out figures, is created for the mobile spectators by the motion of their own vehicles. As in Kordon’s room projections, the cut-out figures were literally animated by light. The sun wheels were driven by solar energy; the projector was the sun itself. In 2008 (*Windspiel Spielfeld*) the job was taken over by the wind: that spins the wheels, that turns the pages of this book.



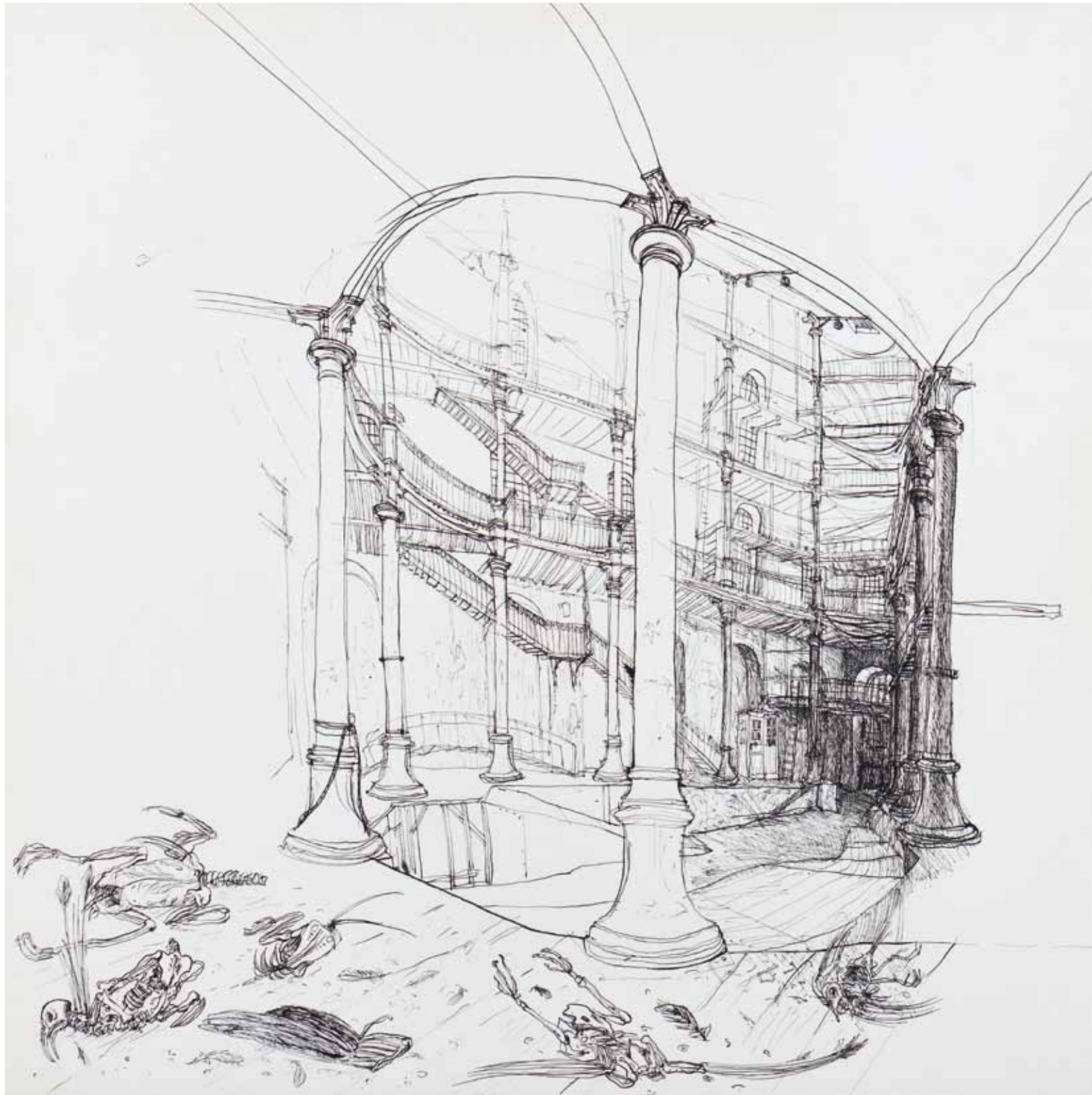
Schatten Sommersonnenwende im Straßenraum, 21.6., Mittag
Summer solstice, shadow on the main street 6/21 midday

10 Minuten vor Sonnenhöchststand
10 minutes before the sun reaches its zenith

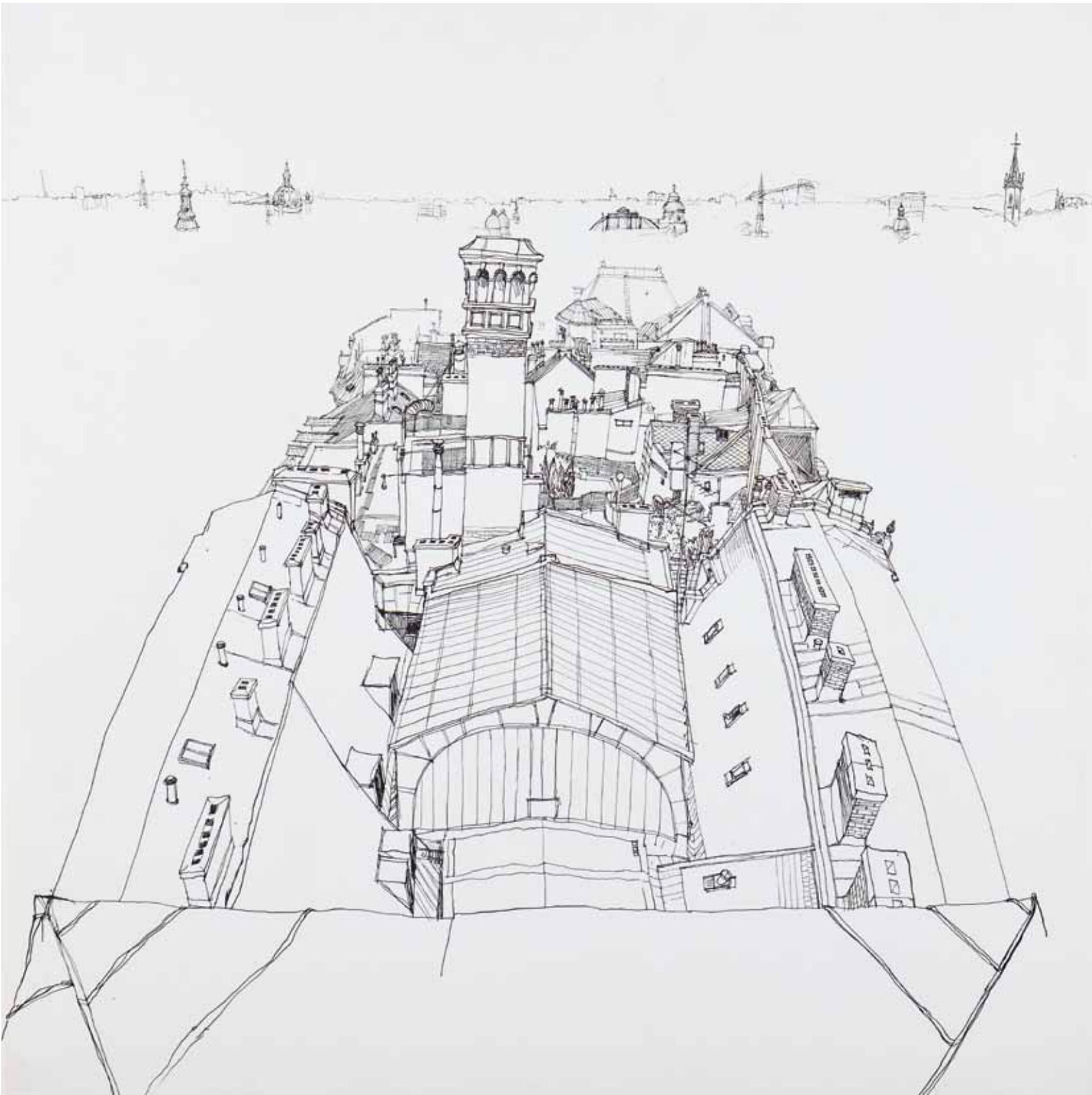




ZOLLAMT SPIELFELD



Semper - Kulissendepot
Semper scenery depot



Dachlandschaft Ankerhaus, Innere Stadt
Roof skyline from the Ankerhaus, first district, Vienna







The Human Mind is Infinite



Mind Consists of Food

METAMORPHOSES

Otto Kapfinger

Metamorphosis is an inherent part of the line of development and of every individual piece of Renate Kordon's work. Her art is not limited to a single medium or a narrow range of forms—even her name was subject to change twice. Predictability, product consistency, and a straightforward image are not in her repertoire. On the contrary, her artistic disposition is based on a spontaneously active imagination, on a feeling for things and relationships in which nothing is fixed or one-dimensional. It is her view of the world that each and everything can be something quite different from what it appears to be at a given moment—according to the paradoxical but true saying, “In this world change is the only permanent thing.”

Metamorphosis—as shocking transformation—is a principle in which only the idea, only the imagination,

reigns supreme. Here matter is secondary; the fabric of form and the material aspect of the artistic idea is in the end arbitrary and almost irrelevant. However much the material world and the rules of pragmatism may determine our everyday life, the artistic principle of metamorphosis constantly and fundamentally disputes the dominance of materiality. Metamorphosis is the iridescent play of the imagination free of material bonds. In the realm of metamorphosis nothing is fixed. Everything is possible, anything can change into anything. The simplest littlest thing can suddenly bloom into a complex universe, banality can turn into surprise, and an entire cosmos can become a child's toy. Chaos constantly becomes cosmos and vice versa. The wide open space without form (which is the original meaning of the Greek word 'chaos') evolves into 'cosmos'—which in Greek originally simply meant order, form and structure—synonymous with ornament, the adorned, and the harmony of the universe. But

even in the apparently eternal order of the stars and planets, change, continuous movement, and transformation are the only permanent features: galaxies arise out of dust and energy, only to disintegrate into dust again or implode and become invisible. Something similar happens in a more familiar space and dimension when tiny, apparently formless, particles like seeds change shape and grow and evolve into complex forms. This orderly, perfectly shaped matter, animated and differentiated, disintegrates again, becomes amorphous, becomes humus, and takes on a completely different shape from which something different, something entirely different, can arise.

Renate Kordon selected a text passage from the Upanishads to accompany her cosmic, blue-black digital prints: *Some people say, in the beginning this was non-being alone, one only; without a second; from that non-being, being was produced.* She named one

of the pieces, *Flat entrance to the universe*, another one she called *The human mind is infinite*, a third she named *Memory surpasses space*. Still another one is titled *Walking on my spaceship*. These short sentences allude to a quality that is consistent in Kordon's work—humour and fine irony—just as metamorphosis as a principle opposes the pathos of the absolute.

Alas, how did these midnight blue digital works come into existence? Kordon used already exposed colour film—actually the beginning and end portions of colour film rolls, meant for disposal. She scratched and scraped into the thin black coating of the film, using a razor blade, coaxing a microcosm of forms and colours out of a formless, colourless exterior, layer by layer: first the deep blue, then light blue, then turquoise, finally the glaring white. These miniatures measuring 24 x 36 mm were then scanned, fed into the computer where they were overlaid with cartoon-like lineation, enlarged to digital prints. Or they were

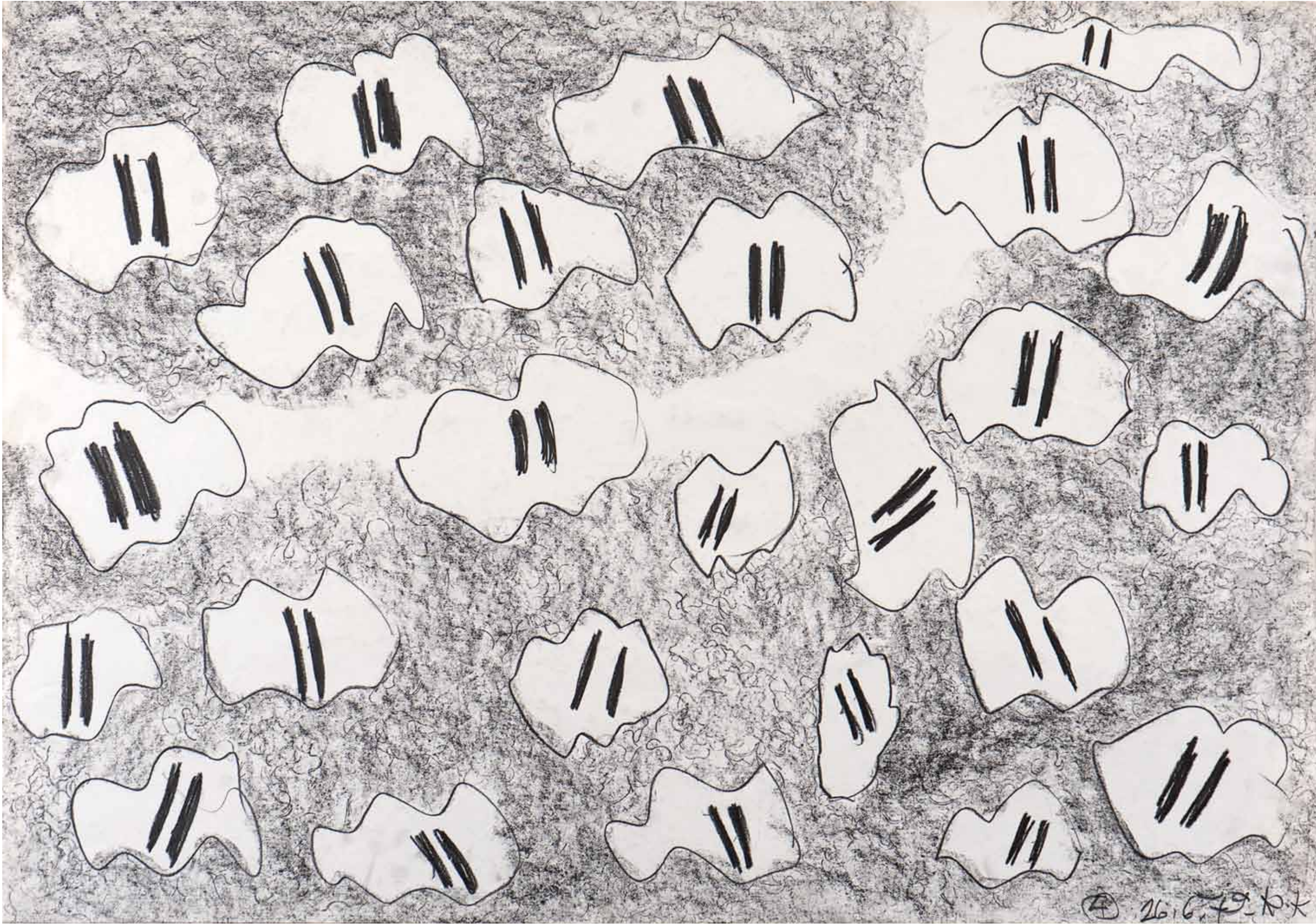
enlarged directly onto photographic paper, and then scratched anew with the razor, bringing new lighter hues and shapes out of the material's dark depths. Red and yellow was added to blue and turquoise.

Alongside her art work Renate Kordon has been practising meditation which is a path leading to the discovery of the innermost layers of consciousness. It means dipping into and groping the way into apparent blind spots of existence. Meditation opens our inner sensitivity to what we normally cannot perceive with our outward senses—eyes, ears, hands, and the polarising intellect. There is an apparent analogy between the practise of yoga and these works. They are a careful but also playful and unpredictable journey into a microcosm, a journey through the blackness, through the superficial blindness of the exposed (blinded) film material into its finest and most sensitive depth. And in this depth lies hidden an entire chaotic and unstructured universe of glowing

colours and shapes—*flat entrance to the universe...*; it appears as though an apparent nothingness suddenly included everything and also something more. Renate Kordon's experiments with animated film as well as her drawings, paintings and sculptures reflect her sensitivity for the inward side of perception, for the energies that, though hidden under a reality that appears fixed, are constantly pushing towards transformation and change.

It is mostly a rather latent, sometimes overtly critical unveiling of the ambivalence of reality by means and phenomena of metamorphosis: by caricature, by the grotesque shaping of materialization by converting it into light data, through partitioning of time, through acceleration of velocity—through exposure of the inner, the entirely different layers under the crusts of real appearance.

Opening address, exhibition *Cosmotics*, CIC gallery, Vienna 2002



TRANSMEDIAL EXERCISES

Beitrag zur Ausstellung · Contribution to the exhibition
Renate Kordon-Karin Frank-Alfred Resch
Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten, Graz
2001



RAUMFLUG DER ARABESKEN

Otto Kapfinger

Seit dem Aufkommen der Elektrizität, seit der Entwicklung ihrer technischen Anwendung zeigt sich das Phänomen einer zunehmenden Verflüssigung von Wirklichkeit. Der elektrische Strom, sein immaterielles Strömen, verwischt alle Grenzen, durchflutet alle Barrieren, lässt alle Distanzen schrumpfen, relativiert jede materielle Verfestigung. Mit der Perfektionierung der Computertechnik vollzieht sich die Repräsentation von Wirklichkeit nahtlos in digitalen Datenströmen. Und diese elektrodynamische Illusion ist so stark und omnipräsent, dass sie unseren Zugang zur wirklichen Wirklichkeit gleichsam vorprogrammiert. Renate Kordon arbeitet seit rund zwanzig Jahren im experimentellen Trickfilmbereich an den Grundlagen, an der kreativen Konfrontation mit dieser Eigengesetzlichkeit der projizierten Wirklichkeit, an der Faszination ihrer Schwerelosigkeit, an der Möglichkeit der spontanen, endlosen Verformbarkeit jedes Partikels von Wirklichkeit. Ihr erster Trickfilm, noch in den 1970er Jahren, zeigte die Verflüssigung einer Glühbirne. Die leuchtende Birnenform verwandelt sich zur Tropfenform, die sich der Schwerkraft unterwirft, sich aus der Fassung löst. Fassung und Form vexieren. Ein weiterer Film – *Hors d’Œuvre* – brachte die Non-Stop-Verwandlung der gezeichneten Linie in alle möglichen Gestalten – eine fantastische Metamorphose der simplen, schwarzen Linie in flächige, räumliche, perspektivische und antiperspektivische Gestalten. Es folgte ein Dutzend Filme mit entsprechender Durcharbeitung unterschiedlicher Techniken.

Bei einer neueren Arbeit in Graz erweiterte sie diese Auseinandersetzung nach zwei Richtungen – in die konkrete und in die virtuelle Welt. Sie reagierte da – im Ausstellungszentrum des Minoritenklosters – auf bestimmte Qualitäten des architektonisch vorhandenen Raumes, fügte ihm mit geformten Linien aus 7mm Stahldraht an den Wänden einerseits ein Mindestmaß an geformter Materie hinzu, sodass die Stimmung dieses Raumes sich subtil in eine andere Dimension erweiterte. Und sie verleibte sich diesen Raum andererseits mit der digitalen Kamera als elektronisches Datenfeld ein, setzte die Abfolge einzelner Bildsegmente im Computer zu einem neuen, illusionären Raum zusammen, und benutzte diesen virtuellen Raum als rotierenden Hintergrund, als Aktionsbühne für die nun von der Wand emanzipierten, zum comic-artigen Leben erweckten Stahlzeichnungen.

Im computerisierten Trickfilm wird so der klassisch orthogonale Raum der Vorhalle des Minoritensaales zu einem rotierenden Panorama expressionistisch-kubistischer Raum- und Flächenverschneidungen. Die Drehbewegung der im Computer neu zusammengesetzten Raumsegmente erfolgt dabei nur scheinbar konstant um eine Mittelachse. Tatsächlich ist es ein dezentrales Abrollen entlang der realen Raumperipherie, wobei punktuell sogar Bildpartikel aus der realen Mitte des gebauten Raumes in diese Peripherie einbezogen sind.

In dieser virtuellen, entfestigten Umformung der Stiegenhalle treten nun auch die flachen Stahldrahtformen verwandelt in Erscheinung, erwachen aus ihren materialkonkreten Posen. Ihre erste Rolle spielten sie davor ganz handgreiflich als Paraphrasen auf die Ornamentik der gusseisernen Geländer, die ihrerseits eine filigrane Eigenständigkeit behaupten gegenüber den mächtigen Mauermassen und der schweren, gleichwohl lichtdurchfluteten Tektonik des barocken Raumes.

Kordons Aufgreifen und Steigern der im Raum anwesenden Ambivalenz durch die Applikation der comichaften Stahlformen wird dann im zweiten Schritt, im elektrischen Filmraum, zur wortwörtlichen Animation. Die Stahlranken entpuppen sich und beginnen zu tanzen, verwandeln sich neuerlich zu Lineamenten, umschlingen das Innen mit dem Außen, schreiben eine Kalligrafie von Dimensionen über das im Loop rotierende Karussell der Raumbühne. Es ist, als hätten die alten gusseisernen Gitter der Halle schon immer diesen Traum geträumt, und hätte es bloß einer künstlerischen Interpretation aus der Gegenwart bedurft, um das Thema latenter Metamorphose hier zu erkennen und in moderner, multimedialer Darstellung zu nutzen – zum heiter pulsierenden, schwerelosen Raumflug der Arabesken.

Textbeitrag zur DVD-Edition über Renate Kordons Installation im Kulturzentrum der Minoriten, Graz, 2002

