

Miron Schmückle

Non saturatur oculus visu

"The Eye Is Not Satisfied with Seeing"

Curator: Hans-Werner Schmidt

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Miron Schmückle – “pictor doctus”

Dr. Hans – Werner Schmidt

My chosen approach is not a particularly original one. The red thread, the one that Miron Schmückle follows through the images of his memory, takes us back to the artist's childhood. Certainly, such impressions exist at the beginning of many artists' biographies. They are offered to us precisely as stylized moulds from which the key for understanding an oeuvre is made. When we look at the works of Miron Schmückle, it is exactly these images from the early memories which are imbued with the fertile ground from which the artistic fantasy grows.

In an interview, Miron Schmückle retrospectively points to the experience of the permanent restrictions in Romania (the exhibition catalogue “Una terza natura”, Bayreuth, 2016). As a child, Miron fights back with the desire to research a jungle sometime. And the images of this vigorous agglomeration of nature are fuelled by visiting the Botanical Garden in Bucharest. The tropical plants are the ones which fascinate Miron as a child. There is another childhood experience that produces a lasting visual echo for Miron Schmückle. At the age of seven, he and his father visit the Art Museum in Sibiu, the city where he was born. The museum, situated in a city palace from the 18th century, bears the name of his founder, Samuel von Bruckenthal. He was named provincial councillor and later, governor of Transilvania during the rule of Empress Maria Tereza. Samuel von Bruckenthal was a collector of late baroque art, who during his lifetime, opened his art collection to the public. Miron Schmückle is particularly interested in still life paintings. Nature's diversity as well as its most bizarre forms are no stranger to him, from the back garden of his house to explorations around it. Yet in the still life paintings, he observes every crawling creature and every butterfly at a complete standstill; every flower and every stem seem fixated, which he never encountered during his walks through nature. The painters put it before the viewers' eyes: nature's abundance and nature's luxuriance.

In his lifetime project, Miron Schmückle is far from standstill and fixation. In 1988, he arrived in the German Federal Republic under adventurous conditions, which he describes now with an admirable calmness. At the age of 22, Miron Schmückle decides to study ceramics and so he finds a place as a student at the Muthesius Kunsthochschule in Kiel. Yet studying experimental painting with Renate Anger offers him a larger resonance space. Within this space, he acts upon his imprinting and opens the visual reservoirs of his childhood, which contain both the narrow enclosure of the social restrictions and the baroque opulence of floral images found at a place, which, like a far-away satellite, is reminiscent of Vienna courtly architecture. In his memories, his homeland, thus, is bipolar. A Janus-faced image is formed by regressive tristesse and bizarre images from an archive of a distinct botany. I have to intervene here with something I discovered during my last conversation with Miron Schmückle in Berlin. The house is barely 50 metres away from the Berlin Wall, the “iron curtain” that Miron, as a child, could only overcome in his fantasy, with an imaginary ticket to the jungle. The façade of the building in which he lives and works now is distinguished by a wall rendering which turned grey by the smog in the capital. Looking at the row of standardized windows, the term “tenement block” instinctively comes to mind. However, the building, in essence, is a rococo construction, stripped barren of its ornamentation by West Berlin construction managements during the 1960s. Miron Schmückle lives and works in this building, used initially as a monastery, with long corridors of pine flooring, ornate walls and high ceilings. The view from the window repeatedly distracted me from the beautiful idea of resting somewhere at a winery or a horse ranch, somewhere between Burgenland and Moldovia.

For over a quarter of a century, Miron Schmückle has been travelling through his botanical worlds. And, as every botanist, he enjoys both presenting the world of plants to enchanted eyes as well as systematizing it, following botanical expertise. Thus, the splendid cosmos of buds, flowers, leaves, stems, stalks, roots and tubers has entered into his series of works. “Hortus Conclusus” started in 1994 and has been continuously expanded, as well as his series “Botanical Archives”, which he began in 1996, while “Architektur Capricci”

is limited temporally to 2003 and 2004. The design of his oeuvre alone illustrates that Miron Schmückle is interested in the proliferation of vegetal growth, whose dynamics is unbounded and luxuriance unlimited, while, at the same time he lays claim to the fact that the alleged disorder implies a form of order.

What artistic roots does Miron Schmückle's botanical world grow from? In the Bruckenthal Museum, Miron, as a child, immersed himself into the world of baroque still life paintings, in particular of Dutch provenience. Even if tulips were considered a parallel currency, treated as an economical factor, beyond these considerations, there was an unusual diversity in the painterly scenes, with a special interest for rarities and exceptional varieties. Nature is present not only in florists' arrangements; the gardener acts as a creator already, which illustrates that Nature can stem from the hands of human beings as well. The flower bouquet as a document of civilisation. Renaissance humanist Jacopo Bonfadio was the first to characterise nature in three ways: The first is the natural one, expression of divine creation, whereas the second is a matter of optimizing it – agriculture for example – with all means available to improve quality and increase production. "Terza Natura", in contrast, presents the image of nature in the mirror of the arts, optimized by aesthetic criteria. It is not without reason that they say that when the table is set, we also eat with the eyes. Yet Dutch still life painting does not only strive to offer a feast for the eyes. Starting with the Middle Ages, when plants were mainly regarded as medical remedies, people also started talking about their symbolic attributes. They were often depicted in Christian representations, thus acquiring the character of pieces of evidence which acted as signifiers, attributing to those who acted, by means of sophisticated interpretations, a number of characteristics, from innocence to voluptuousness. The still life paintings thus represented moral guidelines as well, especially in prints, enriched with moralizing aphorisms which made the whole ensemble to be understood as a moralizing emblematic image. Additionally, they were proofs of luxury, of displayed economical prowess. However, even this economical proof was unveiled as earthly and limited in existence – the addition of a withering leaf alone foretells the impermanence of all things. This act of making meaning – embodied as a floral alphabet – lost its claim to monopolize meaning when, starting with the 16th century, researchers brought back drawings of plants from far away, which were not the carriers of a cosmos of meanings to be "read" by European culture. Here resides the interest of Miron Schmückle, in documenting the exotic, which only represents itself and wishes to be perceived without any overlaying narratives. Miron Schmückle is also interested in the arabesque, an interlaced ornament, rooted in late Hellenism as well as Moorish art, and a cultural hybrid because of its ambiguous narrative structure. The arabesque pretends a narrative moment, but it vanishes in the free play of forms, and, despite its naturalist vocabulary, it moves in abstract ways, which can form a frame for a central figure, taking over the role of a mediator towards a space-creating architecture.

Against this background of ideas, Miron Schmückle seems a taxonomist in a playful mood. His floral sequences – in which the arabesque inclination to symmetry is avoided – always appear on a white background, similar to how isolated plants are documented in botanical textbooks, exposing the plant to the eye which acts as a dissecting organ. In his arrangements, Miron Schmückle is opposed to this ability. Here the eye travels, it focuses on a centre, a point in the middle of the composition – and loses its hold because it follows the vine-like movements and tentacles of the vegetation, and new flowers and fruits attract its gaze. Here, the eye is passing, like a honey bee in a garden resembling a sea of flowers. One just cannot be satisfied by what one sees – this is the name of the exhibition "Non saturatur oculus visu", meaning the eye is not satisfied with seeing. Miron Schmückle challenges the eye to become an organ of understanding. Every detail, every sprouting element, from germinating seed to bud and full floral splendour, is shown in its full individuality offering the eye new views. Similar to a musical composition, in the "all-over", there are piano parts, a swelling forte, and agglomerations in which the visual orchestra performs the central motif anew.

All of this is on a white background – is Miron Schmückle a botanical documentarian after all? No. By addressing cultivars, a botanist has the mission to make new attributions and to integrate them into a system of classifications. Of course, Miron Schmückle knows the world of plants. He knows its components and he proves a confident cultivator, with the help of watercolour brush, coloured pencils and a wide spectrum of painting materials, from water-soluble pigments to water-resistant shellac. He completed the systematic title "Botanical Archives" by adding "out of my brain". Miron Schmückle creates images of his floral fantasies, aware of the fact that by doing so he competes with growers of orchids and roses, who will never tire of breeding new cultivars and naming them in the same creative way. Thus, signifiers assume a new meaning, since English rose growers have created cultivars and named them after representatives of the English Royal Court. And at the same time, in the face of this luxuriant explosion, large projects almost fail because their realisation threatens the existence of a rare plant. Why do not persons with the proverbial green thumb intervene here?

For Miron Schmückle, the equation "x equals y", is an alien idea regarding the classical floral alphabet. When he refers to growth and decay, to courtship behaviour full of colour and to the threat of turning grey, then he flirts with allegory, which tells of a story which subtly implies several layers of meanings. Considering his exotic weaving, with cascading sequences – in which the love for detail is never lost, thus lending the painting the character of a large-format miniature – Miron Schmückle can be placed amidst orchid growers, who set botany on the edge of the artificial. Orchids assume yet another meaning, the erotic moment. In 1907, Paul Kühn wrote about Leipzig artist Max Klinger (1857 – 1920), referring to his graphic cycle "Eine Liebe": "a distant, rutting overindulgence in pleasures is slumbering; it is impregnated with sensuality, just like nights in July are filled with the scent of tuberoses, with a fantastic sensuality, which lives and moves in burning dreams and for which the poet found a symbol in bizarre orchids" (Paul Kühn, Max Klinger, Leipzig 1907, p. 125). These lines can be quoted to illustrate the seducing floral opulence of Miron Schmückle's work. And the erotic connotation is not at all a product of fantasy.

Through his classifications, the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (1707-1778), on the one hand, offered orientation in the field of plants, and, on the other hand, he described their sexual lives – and found out that most flowers have a hermaphroditic structure, possessing both feminine and masculine organs. Miron Schmückle understood this literally, for his buds and flowers are presented in shapes which resemble plump testicles and opening vulvas. [...] However, in Miron Schmückle's world of plants, this orgiastic visual spell is repeatedly counteracted by parts getting older and grey and mould covering the surfaces. Therefore, I would like to quote Paul Kühn again as a historical witness in his writings about Max Klinger: "Sexual satisfaction is not like a fresh and red-cheeked apple inviting you to take a bite, but is more like a rare flower, beautiful and poisonous. Its perfume intoxicates, sending shivers over the finest nerve-endings and then it exhausts the soul and murders it." (idem, p. 123). Had the author seen the erotic-exotic botanical panopticon of Miron Schmückle, he would have rendered a similar poetic description.

Miron Schmückle has been tending the garden of his arts for over 20 years. I would like to call him an artistic hermaphrodite. For him, giving free reign to fantasy meets its corrective in science, or rather, there is a mutual fecundation. In 2016, Miron Schmückle received his PhD in art history. The title of his thesis is: *Quod in fructibus humor, hoc in hominibus est amor* – meaning "Juice is in fruits, what love is in human beings". The thesis addresses the rapport between the description and allegory of nature in the works of Joris Hoefnagel, whose miniatures, Miron Schmückle saw in his childhood at the Bruckenthal Museum. Thus, Miron Schmückle embodies a rare type of artist, the "pictor doctus", the scholar painter – and he presents himself as an artist with a multi-faceted self-reflecting biography. Even if presently he develops his floral opulence in the multicultural capital of Germany, Berlin, the roots still locate him in Sibiu, Hermannstadt, a city which still keeps traces of the Hapsburg baroque in its fertile cultural soil.

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Miron Schmückle (b. 1966, Sibiu) is a Berlin-based artist – born in Romania - who has been living and working in Germany for more than 20 years. He graduated the Doctoral Program at the Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design Kiel in 2016. He has exhibited in Romania only once before, in 2009, at Brukenenthal Museum (Sibiu) and this is his first solo show in Bucharest. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions: Kallmann-Museum, Ismaning (2016); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2015); Colleege des Bernadins, Paris (2013); Kieler Stadtgalerie (2010); Stadtische Galerie Villa Zanders (2008); Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2005); Kunsthaus Erfurt (2003); Museo Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna (2001); Ursula-Blickle Foundation, Kraichtal (2001); 2nd Ars Baltica Triennial of Photographic Art (1999); 4th International Triennial of Photographic Art, Esslingen (1998). His solo shows include: Kunstmuseum Bayreuth (2016); Gallery Manzoni Schäper, Berlin (2011); Brukenenthal Museum, Sibiu (2009); Gallery Rena Bransten, San Francisco (2007); Villa Concordia, Bamberg (2005); Hamburg Kunsthalle (2002); Museum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg (1997); Kunsthalle zu Kiel (1997). His artworks are in numerous public and private collections among which we name: Kunsthalle Kiel, Graphic Art Collection; Ludwig-Forum, Essen; Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg; Villa Concordia, Bamberg; Isobe Art Collection, Tokio; West Collection, Pennsylvania; Schwules Museum, Berlin; Stadtgalerie, Kiel; Museum of Modern Art Berlinische Galerie.