

The Animal Museum

Susanne Fankhauser

Susanne Fankhauser's drawing entitled Das Museum der Tiere Animal (The Museum) is a monumental inkjet print on plastic measuring 300 x 965 cm. The work conceived for our exhibition is small. It was executed in computer-screen size and industrially enlarged to match the dimensions of the long wall opposite the front windows for presentation at the Kunsthalle. As in her spatial installation Die Betrachter und das Kunstwerk (The Viewer and the Work of Art, 1996) the artist used photographs of contemporary artworks in this piece, incorporating once again only works of which reproductions were already available. She finds her motifs in newspapers, magazines, catalogues and books and processes details from the reproductions on the computer. "By virtue of her the highly stylised approach to image-processing", writes the artist Christa Ziegler with reference to Susanne Fankhauser's working method, "the elements become playing pieces of equal value" Although Susanne Fankhauser makes use of photos of sculptural works in her new piece, her creative interest is focused primarily on the contours and surfaces of her figures.

With regard to the drawing exhibited in Bern, the artist says that, much like a large window, it opens a view into the museum. The museum Fankhauser invites her viewers to enter is not a building, however, and there are no people there. It is impossible to distinguish between the viewer and the work of art in this museum of images. The artworks themselves form the museum - indeed, they are the museum. Both the works of art presented and the animals shown looking at them are images reproduced from existing works of art. In her drawing, Susanne Fankhauser includes works from such artists as Braco Dimitrijevic, Mike Kelley, Lothar Baumgarten, Claudia Di Gallo, Jochen Gerz, Maurizio Cattelan, Katharina Fritsch, Robert Rauschenberg, Marie Jose Burki, Jeff Koons, Wim Delvoye, Charles Ray, Stephan Balkenhol, Paul Thek, Bruce Nauman, Abigail Lane, Ashley Bickerton, Joseph Beuys and Diego Giacometti. To her title, Das Museum der Tiere, she added data on the artist, work title and year of completion provided with each of the reproductions (some of which may be incorrect). The collection Susanne Fankhauser presents is composed of works by artists of differing significance. It was not restricted to artworks singled out by art critics, art historians or herself as particularly worthy of attention. Instead, she selected works primarily on the basis of their suitability to her objective of creating the most interesting configurations possible in her drawing. Because Fankhauser works with photos, the view of a given work presented

by the respective photographer was crucial to the selection process. Had she found a particular work in a different photograph, she might well have left it out of her drawing and would certainly have copied it into a different neighbourhood of images than the one in which we now see it. Like everyone else, Susanne Fankhauser is a viewer of art. As an artist, she is also an observer of the process of viewing art. As an artist who works with works of art, she is interested in their concrete manifestation and only marginally in the artistic concepts from which they have emerged. She does not regard the distortions and changes that result from the process of photographic reproduction as faults or deviations from the original but as the very thing that they indeed are: forms. In Fankhauser's art, the reproduction does not refer back to the original; it is an original in its own right and of interest to the artist as form.

Susanne Fankhauser suggests a sequence of spaces in her drawing, relying solely on the arrangement of the figures to accomplish this. She adds no floors, walls or ceilings to her drawing. The walls she does include were already present in the work as represented in the photographs she processed. At first glance, everything appears governed by a system of order, but as soon as the eye begins to wander through the picture, exploring the fictional spatial situation, the world it discovers proves to be endless, bottomless and devoid of orientation. The elements that constitute the pictorial space are countable. The colours in the drawing are varied, vivid and unmodulated. They keep nature at a distance. Although the artefacts represented are not arranged in accordance with the rules of perspective, the relationships among the pictorial elements nevertheless produce configurations which the eye perceives as space for exploration. The arrangement and the interrelationships among the photographed works are more important than the individual pictorial figures. In this drawing, the individual is of significance only in combination with all of the other elements.

Philosophical relativism tells us that only the relationships among things are evident, and not the things themselves. Viewed from this vantage point, Susanne Fankhauser's drawing calls to mind The Imaginary Museum of the erstwhile Spanish-Civil-War soldier and later French Minister of Culture Andre Malraux (1901- 1976). His museum without walls encompasses all works of art which, as art scholar Douglas Crimp has noted, "can be subjected to the process of mechanical reproduction and thus to the discourse that mechanical reproduction made possible: art history" Art as it is now understood in our culture did not emerge until the 19th century with the advent of photography, the museum and art history as a course of university studies. The museum transformed the courtly portrait into a painting, the object of religious ritual into a sculpture. It released objects

from all existing spatial, social and historical bonds and stripped them of their established functions in order to declare them works of art. Andre Malraux recognised that the process of photographic reproduction would make it possible, for the first time in the history of mankind, to build a collection accessible to all in which works from a variety of epochs and cultures could be compared with one another. His great desire was to have all masterworks united in a single museum, and his project reminds us of the idea of the gesamtkunstwerk - the total work of art. Malraux knew that reproduction not only took the work from its context but also robbed it of its material properties as well. While he was clearly convinced that his museum without walls would take the process of intellectualisation to the extreme, his remarks leave no doubt in our minds that every piece in his collection has a referent in the world of objects. Malraux's museum without walls is both an inventory and a phenomenology. In the years since Andre Malraux conceived his museum and opened it to the public through his publications, reproduction technology has been revolutionised by the new media. Technical advances in image processing have made it possible to create pictures which look like reproductions but are actually outright inventions. The mode of reproduction used in the art of Susanne Fankhauser shows that the artist assigns the original and the reproduction to different categories of order. Her museum belongs to the world of images. The referent of a processed image is the reproduction and not its source. Reproduction is used not only to represent a reality that lies outside the visual image but to create an imaginary place as well. Roman Kurzmeyer