

Natura spiritualis opening remarks

Nature always seems to have had a place in art. It is one of the first things we threw ourselves into portraying, and it is difficult to find a time in art history when it has not had a central place. Natura morte, still life, landscape art. Magnificent representations of the incomprehensible work of creation or small details that are intended to reveal the transience of everything. It is an obvious object to portray because it is always at hand, so to speak. But why are we not finished with it, this persistent muse? What more can there be to portray, what more can there be to say about nature? It has already been staged as a mysterious unknown landscape.

An image of the great otherness that opposed our simple, finite life. Or as a metaphor for our intricate psyche, which also branches out as invisibly rooted underground and holds it all together, out of sight. But probably more than anything else, it has been portrayed as the great romantic object; a testimony to the connection, it completely surpasses human understanding, and which ultimately must mean that something else is floating above the waters, pulling the strings, putting the smallest nettle on a leaf, giving light and life and spirit.

However, we cannot get away with some of these cheap standard interpretations when it comes to the exhibition we are in the middle of now. Here, nature is not just beautiful, but also not just a reminder of our transience or the great interconnectedness of everything. I think there is something third at play between nature as romanticization; everything is fantastic, or nature as disillusion; everything is still the same.

The exhibition is about the spirit of nature - *natura spiritualis*. We could perhaps say that which gives nature its nature. But isn't spirit exactly what usually opposes the so-called raw nature. Nature is the tangible, the material, what surrounds us, and the spirit, on the other hand, is what escapes: What we cannot see, but which exists between us and breathes life into the hard materiality. A human being is nature and spirit, which is shown by the dead human body, which is still a piece of nature, but clearly something the spirit has left behind. Why should this not apply to a tree? A large tree that lies dead with stiff roots, but which perhaps shows precisely through this death scene that the transition from living to dead, nature with and without the spirit, is first and foremost a question that concerns us humans. Spirit is what moves. The moving body is the image of the spirited nature, the death-rigidity of the roots is what remains when the spirit is gone. A healthy soul in a healthy body - right?

Art has loved bodies for as long as it has loved nature. Beautiful bodies, whole bodies, bodies that fit into the beautiful nature, bodies as nature has created them. But what then when incomprehensible bodies crawl on the dead tree? When the body is only fragments, and these fragments appear, yes, unnatural to us? Do we see here a counterpart to beautiful nature, or does nature appear there exactly as it is: fragmented, incoherent, and an unsuspecting canvas for our romantic projections. Perhaps we see in this reconstructed and composite

nature a far more productive and opening image of what the spirit of nature actually is; namely, being in change, in metamorphosis, in a form of conflict with itself, and forever unfinished. In this way, *natura spiritualis* perhaps gives us a far more natural image of nature than the Golden Age ever did. Namely, as something that has not finished figuring out what it is, and that requires a present gaze to detach itself from its own self-image.

Just like us, who walk around the exhibition and look, who are ultimately also such a torn piece of nature trying to figure out who and what we want to be.

So perhaps nature itself is not entirely natural, not entirely clear about what it should be. Perhaps it is this doubt swirling around the exhibition here that seems to ask us: What are these images that we are desperately trying to preserve? What is it that we are trying to avoid seeing when we insist that nature should be beautiful in a very specific way?