



Aanant & Zoo

basal

Donald Bernshouse, Stuart Brisley, Julien Carreyn, Jochen Dehn, Merlin James, Philip Loersch, Vlado Martek, Michael Müller, Kasper Pincis, Gerhard Rühm, Max Schaffer

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The Greek origin of the word “basal“ refers to the fundamental and the basic. In medicine and anatomy, where the term is most commonly found, basal describes both minimal levels necessary for survival and the position of an organ at the root of a system or structure. In the arts, drawing has traditionally been the medium most closely associated with formulating the founding principles of a body of work, and bringing to light the elementary processes in an artists’ practice. It is with pleasure that Aanant & Zoo announces **basal**, a group exhibition featuring drawings by 11 international artists. Not only do the works selected indicate a root investigation in each artists’ practice, they also explore notions of the base or bottom from multiple and sometimes contradictory points of view.

The movement of the hand while drawing resembles a scratching or digging, as if the tool, through a groping contact with the surface, could expose hidden forms. Yet it is not just the human hand that can create lines in this manner. On Racetrack Playa, a unique spot in the Mojave Desert, giant boulders wander unobserved – for not completely understood reasons – over the earth’s surface. Jochen Dehn has translated the trails carved by these stones onto paper. In this way he not only refers to the drawing processes of nature, but also simultaneously plays the roll of scientist and storyteller, chronicling and inventing.

In a group of works produced exclusively for this exhibition, “Untersuchungen zu vier Formen“ (investigation of four forms), Michael Müller undertakes an examination of elementary forms through drawing. Four sheets of paper are arranged in a grid-like structure, each bearing a plain shape. Through their rendering and positioning on the paper, each of the shapes prompts a different reading. While these drawings question how material conditions such as the arrangement of paper and elementary creative decisions, like the execution of form, influence perception, another group of works engages the basal in a more visceral fashion. “Cabrio” is the meticulous reproduction of a grouper caught and ceremoniously presented to the camera during a fishing expedition. Shown alongside the wallpapered photograph and the artists’ sweaty and graphite-smearred handprint, “Cabrio” speaks of the primal pleasures of the hunt, as well as the erotically charged conventions of portraiture in the presentation of the kill.



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In Gerhard Rühm, we discover an approach toward elemental processes through intuition and the human body. His “Beidhandzeichnungen” (Both-handed drawings) and “Die rechte Hand zeichnet (gestützter Ellbogen) im eigenen Umkreis und die herangerückte Linke” (Right hand draws its own circumference, elbow supporting, as well as the left placed near it) explore the possibilities of a pre-conscious, a-rational form finding. With the technique of two-handed drawing, the power of the right hand is nullified. Here it is no longer the dominant, willfully articulated right hand against the fumbling, illiterate and untalented left. Both hands are subjected to the same principle, not regulated by cognitive considerations, but rather by the movement of the twin hand. “Rechte Hand zeichnet...” (Right hand draws...) brings the process-oriented aspect of the drawing even further to the fore, in that the repetitive movements of bodily measurement become the criteria of form, rather than any object already existing in the material world.

Stuart Brisley negotiates the basal as a bodily as well as a social process. The gestural and expressive lines of his 1957 drawings, in which one can recognize a mouth opening in a scream, point to the various strategies with which Brisley engages with power and violence in his work. His “Collection of Ordure” is also situated in this tradition: the pile of human waste is painstakingly constructed from fine lines and presented in an enlarged format. The work demands, as does Brisley’s entire oeuvre, to be understood as a political act. As a part of the Ordure collective, Brisley has, for years, explored filth, trash and dreck, and also how the attribution of such qualities can lead on the one hand to exclusion but on the other to value.

Certainly basal mustn’t mean only libidinous and instinctual. A focus on the basal can just as well refer to reduction and sublimation. Vlado Martek, who through literature found his way to fine arts, investigates elemental processes of poetry in his series “Bijela Olovka” (white pencils). The individual components of poetry and of artwork are reduced to their basal building blocks: white paper, white pencils, the structure of a sonnet, a mirror. In the footsteps of Zen Buddhism, Martek seeks, through a steady withdrawal toward singular elements, to arrive at a deeper, if unnamable, truth. The basal as reduction can also be found in the work of Donald Bernhouse. In his construction drawings for minimalist sculpture, the material of the object is not the focus, but rather planes, lines, reduction and repetition come to the foreground. The artist, who hails from Hawaii, was highly influential in the formulation of Minimalism in the 1960s, but after a few years retreated nearly completely from the art world. His drawings are presented in this context as a rediscovery.

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