

Black House – Red House

Emil Sorges' typical ornamentation, consisting of abstract and figured forms that continuously evolve, depend upon each other, and generate new structures, covers all the surfaces of his exhibited work, whether it be wood, canvas or sculpture. Delicate lines and engravings traverse the in places closed forms and shapes; dense and compact areas alternate with sparse patches which in turn define space for separate placings. This profusion of abstract and gestural elements testifies to a rapid way of working that includes the coincidental and the spontaneous. The diverse and, at times, turbulent variation of the individual picture segments merges into a dynamic picture surface. Emil Sorge unites an expressive language of forms with the spontaneity of the informal. The intensity of color, sometimes strongly luminous, other times discreetly subdued, changes according to the chosen surface structure. The current retrospective of this artist allows a direct comparison, giving an overview of the entire range of his artistic work from wood cutting to painting to sculpture. It is extraordinarily important to the artist that the various art forms not be ranked among each other, but rather be seen as equal.

Emil Sorge's work emphasizes the independent value and effect of the various genres. He overcomes the academic separation of painting, drawing, and sculpture by regarding each domain as equal to the others. Emil Sorge's artistic position is to pursue disentanglement from traditional hierarchical structures and focus on the multi-layered independent existence of, for example, the woodcut. In contrast to the usual procedure of using the processed woodcut merely as a template for the production of prints, Emil Sorge places the material itself at the center of his work. The woodblock, deliberately bearing recognizable and comprehensible traces of work, is not shown as an artisan's tool but instead as an independent three-dimensional object. In Emil Sorge's understanding, the passive material becomes the tangible expression of his artistic activity, the visible proof of his mode of operation. The traces left on the wood attest to a sometimes draining process which involves

the coaxing of forms and figures out of the wood. He is aware that in doing so, the artist also reveals something of his "artistic secrets".

For the first time, this artist exhibits the woodcuts -- usually considered solitary sculptures -- across from a single print on a canvas acting technically as a mirror-inverted reproduction. The direct comparison fascinates not only through the change of perspective but also through the change from three-dimensional object to two-dimensional likeness. The present publication impressively follows this distinction between image and reproduction, division and unity, right and left. Through the simultaneous display of the same motif using different techniques, not only the immanent material properties but also the sensual and emotional qualities of each genre are explored and visualized. This approach allows differentiated surface structures and implementations without suspending the fundamental abstraction. The wholly processed wooden sculpture is a systematic further development of the woodblock. Now released from the technicalities of the printing format it looms sometimes meters high, expansive and free-standing, and reaches an installation-like character in the lighted variant, yet remains similar to its original form as a processed woodcut.

Projection and reflection, positive and negative, light and dark are the significant aspects that react with one another in the selected works -- a game of opposites which is characteristic of Emil Sorge's artistic understanding. There is no hierarchy between the different sections, no dominance; rather, equal coexistence determines the interplay on the picture's surface, inviting the discovery of the different levels, the tensions and volatilities.

Emil Sorge's work is characterized by pieces that have archaic and symbolic meaning, such as house, boat or gate, all of which are more or less visibly connected

to one another. Most of the exhibited pieces can be thematically grouped together under the term "setting". This setting can be geographic, material or symbolic in nature and describes concrete places or dwellings, but also stages of the transition between two places, between the real and the unreal world. The very succinct titles of the pieces support this perception.

An apparently geographic setting is evident in the title of the exhibition and the catalog. With "Black House – Red House" Emil Sorge refers not only to a significant group of pieces but at the same time fashions a link to the location of the exhibition, namely to the Red House in Monschau, that unique monument of bourgeois home décor. This serendipitous co-incidence fits perfectly into the entire body of his work, as it illustrates a thematic focus of the artist: the conflict with the archetypal setting, the home. The light sculpture "Black House – Red House", which shows just one variation of the longhouse, was created in 2007. Two years later came the painting "Red House", and in 2010 Emil Sorge re-visited this highly symbolic theme with his edition "Black House – Red House", composed of 50 wooden objects, each in the form of a small house.

For Emil Sorge, the motif "house" is a synonym for dwelling, protection and security, and it invites the viewer to gather there. The sculptures he has been creating display elements of a whole village, because the artist's dwellings offer space not only to families but to all who are seeking refuge, community and security. This interpretation is even clearer in his most recent sculpture, in which the house is anchored on a boat. With "Ark" (2010), Emil Sorge reminds us of the finitude of all life and, through a biblical reference, warns of the limits of our Earth's resilience.

Along with the more fundamental focus on the house as a place of refuge, there are also a series of pieces with concrete locational designations, like "Helgoland" (2005) or "Lima" (2010), and also "Laguna" (2010). The title suggests vacation memories, the yearning to see far-off places, and personal experiences. The pieces are figured just enough that thematic connections are recognizable, but at the same time are so abstract that viewers are left with enough room for their own interpretations. Emil Sorge creates places, real and unreal. In a metaphorical sense he builds houses of the most diverse orientations, into which the viewer can retreat, according to individual mood. These are refuges that offer security and protection, but also leave room for strong emotions like love, sorrow and pain.

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