

The Forest Loam

essay on the works of Philip Seibel by Paddy Butler

As unfortunate as it may be, the human trait of locating an individual's work in terms of influence, history, lineage and country of origin is something that helps us to in part decipher a cultural language; a culture's feelings, and by dint of general and particular interpretation, a culture's creative force. Tilman Riemenschneider and Albrecht Altdorfer, by way of varying influences, whether religious or otherwise, physical or abstract, tilled the dense forests of Mitteleuropa to remember an imprinted truth regarding Europeans; as a people whose early struggles were defined as dwellers of the forests and wooded rivers; whose thoughts and feelings were intertwined and housed by the black sylvan thicket, by the pith of hollowed trunk, dark weather beaten bark, and the time bent rings within. *Der Wald* is a primal, almost genetic glue that shapes the traditions and identity of a people, a harnessing of consciousness through narrative, be it fused through the Brothers Grimm or the philosophical and poetical awakenings of Herder, Hamann or Hölderlin. Both Riemenschneider and Altdorfer, as expressed within their respective works, moved with and thought with wood, as did both understand the very real limits of human artifice; man could do many great things under God's watchful eye, but pride is mocked by the very limits of the mediums they've mastered, through the limits of painting, through the limits of sculpture. Philip's work ruminates on this legacy and points again to the contradictions that engender human creative endeavour, as it is to

perceive
remember
mimic
mirror
imitate
replace
reflect
create
destroy
begin [again]

and [finish] again, nacheinander and nebeneinander. And that the cycles of our culture are ever more in opposition; and that the rhetoric of historical progress serves an all too familiar tool to beat questioning minds. A means to consolidate power; political, environmental, scientific or otherwise. And that sceptics form the necessary counterarguments of unsustainability and profligacy - opposites cure opposites says Rabelais. The daedal effect of Philip's work is to call on the tradition of memory as espoused by those German forefathers of craft, and at the same time it stands as a minatory hymn, forcing into the future the scorched bark from the crucifix, when Christ uttered those supposed last words, I thirst. Nothing is in all parts happy, and the thirst is environmentally and ecologically ours. The restraint of the works by Philip patiently demonstrates our nervous hold on reality and truth. But his discourse is not to preach, it is more to laugh about creativity...to wonder and wander, *der Wald*. His elongated domestic objects recognise the futility of reason and at the same time allow us to jest. His work allows us to gently reconsider traditions from before, to think about the objects hewn from the wood from where those same traditions first took mnemonic hold - the giddy creative release, the play of connecting with the past, as with the bird-mimicking lute from children's lore; the forest loam, the leavening of imagination, to effect a trick of who we might be, and once were.



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