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Stefan Löffelhardt's ideas, and the corresponding developments in his work, were triggered and decisively shaped by two distinct visual experiences. These could not have been more contrasting, indeed contradictory. On one hand there were the overpowering encounters, during his visits to Italy, with Massacio's fresco 'The Expulsion from Paradise', from the latter's cycle in the Brancacci Chapel in the S. Maria dei Carmine in Florence. It is difficult to imagine a more touching or moving rendition of the subject. Massacio's fresco depicts the first man and woman being driven out from the security of the well-tended, paradisiacal garden into despair and homelessness. Henceforth, they must carry sole responsibility for their actions in a vast and still entirely intractable world. Löffelhardt received the second jolt in his studio, when his eye fell on a discarded, partially consumed apple. The leftover core had already begun to decompose. The experimentally minded Löffelhardt saw in this unspectacular object evidence of the transience, creeping or otherwise, of all genuine reality, animate or inanimate. Thereafter, any attempt to represent a plausible situation had to establish a specific constellation. Juxtaposing one object and another that was incongruous and allowing the speakers, or the deputizing objects, to communicate constructively with one another, could achieve this. Furthermore, only the resulting dialogue illuminated the characteristics of the respective partners and rivals. Later on, of course, Löffelhardt realized that the apple core complemented the apple motif of Adam's deception. But in the cold light of day, or, rather, when one initially sees or enters Löffelhardt's sculptured landscapes, familiarity with such nations does not prove prerequisite for interacting with them. For all his rigorous thinking and despite his astonishing eloquence, Löffelhardt is neither a conceptual artist nor a theoretician. His concept develops as the manual work progresses and only then. Spiritual reflection runs parallel to artistic endeavour. Nevertheless, his photographs of three-dimensional models, in particular, provide welcome assistance. In the latest colour photographs, the viewer more or less looks down on a terrain that appears to extend indefinitely. The severely cropped image suggests the limitlessness of the landscape. Löffelhardt refers to these landscapes as 'Blache', a German ward seldom used nowadays. 'Blache' is etymologically linked to the German ward 'Plane', meaning thin sheeting, used to protect things not in use, as well as the word 'Brache', indicating a flat, undeveloped plain.

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The photographs of a 'Blache' depict what seems to be a randomly or heterogeneously populated region; relatively uninviting, the scattered objects recall a site waiting to be developed. They show the kind of place on our planet that exiles from paradise must contend with. Large black boots intrude unexpectedly on this inhospitable scene. They appear close up and threatening. There are other people, alluded to in the photographs, also gazing down on the barren landscape from above. As only their shoes are visible, their involvement in any verbal exchange is peripheral. They remain somewhere between the landscape and the viewer, outside the depicted scene. Despite their incongruous positioning in the picture, they assume the role of repoussoir figures, popular in Romanticist art. Suddenly, the distinction between near and far, large and small, model and reality, even different levels of reality, breaks down; all sense of scale vanishes and only a momentary state of affairs remains. This is what the photographs, and accordingly also the installations, reveal. The temporary state of a particular constellation invariably emphasizes its transience and implies that its ultimate manifestation is still a long way off and possibly unattainable. Until then, each perceived and accepted state of reality is considered valid. Ultimately Löffelhardt's landscapes never present results that can be unequivocally evaluated. Instead they show provisional arrangements, which he accepts as possible solutions, given the transitory nature of things. However, just as important as the contemporary feet of the landscapes, is the impression that they describe a real state in the world, which defies further analysis, like some primordial scene.

Löffelhardt's concept lies in the way he raises issues. By contrast his working methods could aptly be described as intuitive, because, in accordance with the classical approach of sculptors and painters, his dissatisfaction with the status quo compels him to seek out alternatives. The special feature of such fleeting situations is that they facilitate the most valuable and far-reaching interactions. A viewer cannot enter an entirely harmonious pictorial space, but Löffelhardt's model-like situations, derived from oppositions or even contradictions, demand very personal interpretations. The sculptured landscapes are almost beyond description as any sense of uniformity is undermined. "I am currently developing individual areas in the landscape into autonomous units, which also establish links to the other areas." Löffelhardt takes extraordinary risks, because he combines all conceivable manner of things-figures and landscapes, representational and abstract elements. Even the meaning of one and the same detail depends on the context it is viewed in and can have various meanings. "I think that the essence of a work of art has less to do with what is there than how it is presented (n.). A verbal interpretation can only describe one aspect of the picture. Some elements must simply exist, as they are, so that a complete, contradictory, complex or simple picture results. Such elements convey meaning by themselves in a way that defies and rejects verbalization. For me, the reason for making a picture lies principally in evoking a feeling that raises issues of restlessness, possibly, or attempted harmony,

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beauty, contradictoriness and uniformity and even meaning. No, I am sceptical about a picture's so-called meaning, which allows its translation into a story by applying certain terms and then communicating this content in the absence of the picture itself." (1)

An imposing structure of white polystyrene stands upright in the middle of the room. It represents an enormous apple core. This three dimensional alien could be viewed as a paradigmatic sculpture: as opposed to a sculpted object, whose surface is shaped artistically, such sculpture is made by peeling away at the original form, piece by piece. Löffelhardt has sawn into the square block so carefully that, in most cases, the individual sections can no longer be distinguished, much as in antique columns. The form is also an architectural element, upright and high, like a monument. In addition it assumes a figurative role. Walking around the sculpture, with its peaks, edges and troughs, generates a multitude of impressions within the unfolding landscape. A vantage point that juxtaposes the core with a thick mattress might focus on the contrast between vertical and horizontal. Alternatively, viewing the white monster next to a small toy is more likely to raise the issue of scale, and possibly thereafter, of how to characterize figures and objects. Does making something large perhaps mean diminishing it as well? This question touches on the issue of models for the first time.

All elements in the sculptured landscapes have some model like features. There are entire zones that merely describe extenuated planes, resembling empty stages. Within the parameters of such a game, the stage itself becomes one of the protagonists. A rolled up carpet is laid out on the stage or a wooden structure is positioned at its edge. The sounds of a violin, playing a barely audible folksong, emanate from a cassette recorder and transform the empty stage into a music hall. In Löffelhardt's work, unrequited longing is invariably accompanied by a dose of pragmatism. The pleasant warmth of a mattress is negated by the insertion of an angular radiator. There are also small toy cars and figurines, which are examples of pre-existing models. Together these impressions direct us to the central concern, which is how the artist goes about populating his landscapes. Löffelhardt's point of departure predates the existence of models; his pictures represent the act of creation itself, as it were, and he generates a climate in which an idea can lead to a work of art. In this context, the word 'picture' refers, on one hand, to the model-like function of his installation as a metaphor and, on the other, the term applies literally to painting. The artist himself has acknowledged as much: "Increasingly, I see my work as 'painting in' a space using various forms, colours and materials:"(2) His early works from 1997/98 were already conceived of as trial arrangements of a variety of parameters, with which he could gauge a space, investigate materials and bring the work closer to the viewer.

In these early works, Löffelhardt restricted himself to only a few constructive elements and focused on such formal categories as scale,

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proportion and the relationship of line to surface and form. However, his attempts to avoid unambiguous combinations of characteristics and establish an open-ended domain, that allowed new constellations from each vantage point, were already apparent. It goes without saying that symmetrical arrangements were not permitted and the composition was organized asymmetrically, based on parallel, diagonal and intersecting relationships. The sculptural dialogue within the work incorporated the viewer. Since then Löffelhardt has taken greater risks, dispensing almost entirely with a coherent, overall sculptural picture. The contradictory elements can be found in a variety of criteria such as the choice and combination of different surfaces as well as the positioning and treatment of certain materials in far more complex compositions within the heterogeneous landscape.

In 2001 the glass showcase of an Interfood store in Aachen was placed at Löffelhardt's disposal. The spacious display case could be viewed through three of its glazed sides. Löffelhardt transformed it into a workshop. As one looked in through glass walls, it also resembled an aquarium. By installing a panel made of multiple sections and placed on two wooden trestles, much like a work surface, which was raised almost to eye-level, he introduced a new, stage-like dimension. One of the supporting trestles was put on a wooden pedestal, creating an incline. The work surface provided a neutral venue. It also had a decisive voice amid the general hubbub as it consisted of such diverse functional objects and refabricated components as a wooden panel, a drying rack, a conveyance on rollers and several white acrylic tiles. In addition, all parts were crudely wrapped in transparent plastic film. An enormous roll of some indiscernible material, wrapped in black and white film and running counter to the slope, stretched across the stage. The sculptor might have utilized these materials to make works of art. At the same time they were already sculptures. Löffelhardt's general approach can be characterized by his suspending the distinction between basic materials and prospective or finished works of art and positing the validity of both. Elements not usually viewed together appear simultaneously, providing the foundations for the ambiguity of the landscape. Papers are scattered over the reflective surfaces. A polished, metal sphere gleams in their midst. Lastly, there is the figure, standing on the slope and painted a cold sky-blue, whose arms have been left white and untreated. It is precisely such details as the arms, alluding subtly to both work done and injury, which underscore the overall impression created by the work. Ruinous elements force their way in. These are expressed by the shabbiness of the materials. An element of yearning for the unattained and possibly unattainable also resonates through the work. This is embodied by the figure, apparently gazing into the distance, as well as the building plans for the ideal city of Sforzinda, designed by the Italian Renaissance sculptor and architect Antonio Filarete, lying on the floor of the showcase. There are good reasons for the title of the installation: 'Atlantis'.

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Löffelhardt makes the most of the qualities of the showcase in his work. The glass facades mirror the urban setting with its rundown 60's housing, advertising and street signs, cars and pedestrians. He multiplies the reflections by leaving the glazed back wall see-through and employing white, shiny papers, plastic film, bright spotlights and a perspective-distorting sphere. This inextricably links the model-like reality of the installation to the real situation outside. By changing position, together with the unfolding events on the street, the viewer is confronted with a stream of unexpected impressions that he registers as a series of abrupt and overlapping shifts.

For the Kunstverein Cuxhaven, Löffelhardt has created his most ambitious installation to date. It also represents the most precise formulation of his concerns as exceptionally heterogeneous materials are used to articulate the expressive settings. Furthermore, the individual parts, left largely untreated and worthless, possess little artistic value by themselves. Combining the separate elements to form a cohesive landscape was crucial. To ensure this from the outset a far-away fluorescent tube, representing a bright, shining "horizon", catches the viewer's attention the moment he enters the space, before he can look closely at the individual works. The latter are arranged along staggered axes to create an impression of ordered disorder, as though the site has evolved naturally. Then again the installation's title 'Blachfeld' conjures up a primordial landscape awaiting use. The objects therein suggest various desired scenarios for such utilization. The sculptural conglomerations of material, distributed around both rooms like small islands, also have names, which shed light on the overall content and facilitate comprehension. Most of these titles can be linked in some way to morphology or locations with specific functions. The viewer is greeted by 'Ground Control', consisting of a mattress and a functioning radiator. Another mattress in the second room is poetically titled 'Secret Setting'. This is accompanied by a wooden palette, a model van, 'Event Calendar Week 24', and layers of white cotton wool. The light blue or white plastic films of 'Dip' provide relaxing glimpses of sweeping vistas as well as associations of damp lowlands. By contrast 'Steep Track', a slanting staircase construction, is a vertical indication of revolt. The three apple cores tower above everything else, like striking geological formations. Sensory impressions of a very different, no visual type contribute substantially to the overall effect, by increasing the number of oppositions in the mix. Cold and warmth, noise and silence, for example, supplement the optical rollercoaster of level and soaring planes, the multiple references to painting and sculpture, hard and soft, haptic and scarcely tangible materials, as well as illuminated and darkened zones. Disposable gloves, stuffed to the brim, suggest aseptic insensitivity as well as pleasant warmth. Horse blankets and radiators also generate a feeling of warmth. One might expect the cassette recorder, left in the rudimentary staircase construction, to resound with the latest songs or meaningless background noises. Instead, the far-off playing of a violin is frequently interrupted in its scarcely audible rendition of an old folksong.

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Stefan Löffelhardt's installation, which actually resembles a stage set, touches on many issues. Attaining an overall impression from the work given, at times in the face of, all the sensory information, demands great sensitivity and imagination. On discovering the key, one realises that Löffelhardt's 'Blachfeld' achieves the impossible. Löffelhardt's stroke of genius is that his installation, consisting of pictures one can walk about in, invokes the dreamed up ideals of a Romantic landscape. However, by selecting and combining mostly cheap and common materials he places this longing in the vivid, contemporary context of everyday wear and tear, shabbiness, contrasts and contradictions. The artist's two experiences, mentioned at the outset, have proved to be of lasting relevance for his work, as, together, they provide an analogy for something obvious merging with something of universal significance.

Renate Puvogel (translated by Christopher Muller)

- 1) Letter to the author dated 1.6.2003
- 2) ditto