

Hella Berent

“For years I have been striving to attain a line that encompasses everything.”

This quote from a conversation with Hella Berent on the occasion of her current exhibition “Autobiography” at Kunstverein Leverkusen illustrates the central importance of the *line*, the drawing, in her oeuvre. “Everything starts with a drawing. It is my center, or better, my beginning and my end result – and everything develops by means of the line.” Whether a working surface is paper or a wall, Hella Berent masters the surface with the line, eliding certain lines from the concentration, directing it to find yet another place for her positioning, tactually examining the surface for hidden spaces, which are revealed where line meets emptiness, lacunae representing nothingness.

Surface and space are the two central themes of Hella Berent’s “extended drawings,” and they are closely related to the concepts of delimitation and the dissolution of “matter”, of material form. The wall as part of a space is matter, demarcating the interior and exterior, delimiting, defining. Dissolving the wall, surmounting its material limitations, enables her to advance into space. She regards this drawn space as emotional space, as contemplative and existential space. Repeatedly, she has striven to embed herself, to find her place – although she is freer now than she was at the beginning of her artistic career, when her own body was the recognizable starting point of her drawings and installations.

Although nothing figurative has been in evidence in her work for quite some time, there is still this physical presence in the way the line is set – a fleeting trace of movement both on the surface and in space. The result of a single movement of the hand, naturally, yet a graphically based movement manifesting that which has been seen and lived, a letting go, combining, focusing, the releasing of lines and color traces, of progressions. A tremendous dynamic, a constant alternation between compacted and empty spaces, of transparency and density characterize this process of articulation – enabling the emergence of a drawn “autobiography” to allude to the title of the exhibition. Hella Berent’s works are closely aligned with her feelings, her mental world, with the experiences and visual impressions obtained in her numerous travels in the Near and Middle East. Yet, her formulations are open enough to enable and include associations by viewers and to invite or rather challenge their own mental movements on the surfaces. If her drawings in their non-figurative form are always an open counterpoint, an open conversation partner, her ceramic sculptural vessels assert themselves as clear physical counterparts in space. Glazed blue as the color of the sky and of water, their hue ranging in shade from cobalt to turquoise corresponds to that to which she has succumbed again and again in her Near and Middle Eastern travels. As large colored hollow bodies, they occupy space and create a reality. Their blue-glazed surfaces contain worlds and depths in which we could become lost if not for the irrefutable presence of the piece itself which brings us back to the here and now, only for us to abandon ourselves to the beauty of the Arabic calligraphy with which Hella Berent has inscribed her poetry upon the surfaces of her glazed vessels.

Here, too, with her sculptural objects, the alternation between the extension of boundaries and the concentration of the ineffable, and the decisive role of color in the dissolution of form, as with her drawings, create space through the setting of lines – free space, cognitive space...

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