

A LAVISH APOCALYPSE

Zweijahrtausendfern (Two Millennia Away) is a visual roller coaster ride full of shifting impressions. It references Pompeian mural painting with contemporary means. Patricia Lambertus lays a trail by combining our knowledge of the destruction of the city in 79 AD with set pieces from art history and today's visual world. She stages downfall as a remote theme and depicts the volcano and its threat as a picturesque vacation motif. Lambertus also addresses the central problem for artists of the time, namely the nesting of images and the question of how sensory illusions overlap. From this, Lambertus develops the actual subject of her work: *zweijahrtausendfern* renders perception visible and hints at a way of seeing and understanding beyond comprehension. By sampling existing digital images, the artist achieves a peculiar degree of reality that the painters in Rome and Pompeii could only dream of – if at all – and creates a completely unreal world. The result is a convincing visual density that flaunts its own artificiality while exerting an oppressive atmospheric effect.

A characteristic feature of surviving Roman murals from the first century was the staggered illusion. Architectural elements and frames were painted onto walls. Within them, in turn, were painted scenes with their own spatiality. Thus, on this simple masonry, a double illusion was created: first, lavish architecture, and second, a view of a (normally mythological) landscape. Even without a digital screen, Roman citizens were accustomed to living in several visual worlds at once. Each possessed its own logic, and the viewer's eye jumped back and forth between them all with great ease. When two scenes were depicted in one landscape, they could be perceived either separately (a nude woman on the left, a hunting scene on the right) or together (the story of Actaeon); a kind of alternation also took place, an interaction between seeing and knowing. Art history refers to multifocal works of art, where the eye can and is supposed to jump around the image, in contrast to those where everything is subordinate to a single pictorial idea.

The spatial experience of *zweijahrtausendfern* in the pavilion of the Gerhard-Marcks-Haus is defined by a multifocal yet hierarchical composition. There is a basic structure: a black and white tiled room with multiple vistas. The viewer enters the installation through the physical door of the pavilion and is immersed in the visual world. The classical pediment and portico, as well as the view straight past them and into the distance, govern the line of sight. The walls to the left and right play a subordinate role. They are less open; significant parts of the surfaces are themselves wall elements, so that the entire space seems to open out into the city panorama behind the columns. In the actual interior, there is a free-standing cut-out photograph that connects the illusion of the front wall with the viewer's space: from front to back, the figures become smaller. The viewer realizes relatively quickly that it is printed wallpaper, and in several places, the work gives the impression of layers pasted over each other. In the corners, the curtains each hang in front of a piece of wall where the large panorama appears to have been scraped off. The work portrays multiple illusions while assertively demonstrating that it is totally flat at the same time. If the viewer turns around, all illusion disappears. Nothing is pasted to the back wall. It is almost empty, apart from a small postcard stand with souvenirs of the work, thus adding another layer of nesting: a postcard of a wall hanging full of postcard motifs.

Patricia Lambertus' iconography is ambiguous. The openness of her motifs is nevertheless hierarchically structured. The man in the Imperial Army uniform, who has removed his helmet, is a direct allusion to the Star Wars saga and thus to an image culture that, at a maximum, is spread all over the world. Only die-hard fans, however, would immediately recognize that this is an "Incinerator Trooper." The woman next to him is possibly from a video game. Is it Grace Armstrong? And then it starts to get more obscure. To the left, in front of these two, is a figure in the foreground that directly references Gerhard Marcks' (1889–1981) *Aliena* (1969), which stands in the sculpture courtyard in front of the pavilion.

On the right, a woman kneels among bones and ancient remains, and next to her are people collecting war materials. The viewer in the pavilion might have already seen any one of these motifs. There is cohesion between them because Lambertus combines them; they become one image because the viewer sees elements and connects them.

The portico and the floor depicted on the front wall open up the view of a three-part landscape. To the left and right are images of Naples and Mount Vesuvius, and in the center is another unnamable but apparently Italian city, above which airborne troops are parachuting down. The aircraft and parachutes are reminiscent of the Korean War. One level up – above all three parts of the front side – rectangular shapes float in the blue sky, separated by clouds in the middle section, and behind postcard motifs on the left and right. The front and back are constantly changing. Only the figures on the floor have a relatively clear place in the imaginary space. But what is happening there? Are they two fighters from our contemporary visual culture, watching an old-fashioned airborne landing in an undefined Italian piazza? In the same piazza, the burning of church reformer Girolamo Savonarola (1498) is also taking place (lifted from a well-known painting in San Marco, Florence). He was burned to death in Florence, but this marketplace is different – why does it look like Italy? Are the soldiers coming to free Savonarola? Have they noticed the UFOs above their heads? *zweijahrtausendfern* cannot be deciphered, but it can be read. On all three walls are people in protective suits with bottles. They are spraying or cleaning. They are all the same size and once the viewer has identified one, they will recognize the others. Along with the architectural elements, they are the unifying elements of the composition.

It may be assumed that the science-fiction fighter will be recognized by more people than the detail of the burning of Savonarola. In sampling, quotation plays a role in that it allows the artist to

show her sources and the viewer their knowledge. Just as in music, in this composed image the conventional anchoring of the two only becomes visible through these references. But the references create coherent groups of pictorial motifs, and from this – in addition to the alternation between surface and suggested space – a rhythm emerges that allows the eye to wander over the work. What seems even more important to me is what the philosopher Ernst Cassirer called *Ausdruckswahrnehmung* (perception of expression), an immediate perception of atmosphere, decadence, and threat that cannot be resolved through analysis. Whoever is looking at all these motifs will find pop culture and military references. If they then consult art history, they will also come up with the Romans and the Renaissance. Yet, by standing in the work itself and following its visual rhythm, they will notice an uneasiness that does not dissipate, not even when everything turns out to be fake on the way out.

ZWEIJAHRTAUSENDFERN

Raumbezogene Installation für den Pavillon im Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Bremen, kuratiert von Dr. Arie Hartog, 320 × 525 × 460 cm.

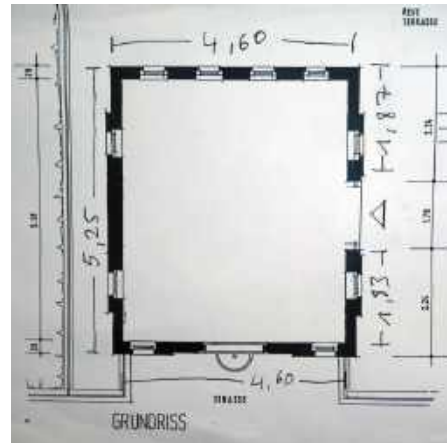
Material: im Digitaldruckverfahren hergestellte Tapete, Konturfiguren, Holzkonstruktion, Camouflage-Netz, Kontursäulen-Fototapete, Camouflage-Klebeband, künstliches Efeu, künstliche Pflanzen, Postkarten, Postkartenständer, Wandkonsole ‚Putte Antik‘ Kerze, goldfarbenes Tondo, Stuckgipssäulen, Sandsäcke

Die bildgewaltige Rauminstallation basiert auf den historischen Wandmalereien der antiken Stadt Pompeji und bringt diese in einen zeitgenössischen Kontext. Innerhalb des Bildraumes gibt es diverse Schichten von Bildern, die wie die Fundhorizonte in der archäologischen Stratigrafie (Schichtenkunde) analysiert und datiert werden können.

Space-related installation for the Pavilion of the Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Bremen, curated by Dr. Arie Hartog, 320 × 525 × 460 cm.

Material: wallpaper printed in a digital process, wooden construction, camouflage net, contour columns photo wallpaper, camouflage tape, artificial ivy, artificial plants, postcards, postcard stand, wall console "putto antique", candle, gold colored tondo, stucco plaster columns, sandbags

This visually striking installation is based on the ancient city of Pompeii's historical wall paintings, placing them in a contemporary context. Several image layers comprise its pictorial space. They can be interpreted as archaeological stratigraphic studies, which analyze and date archaeological stratum.



Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Pavillon / pavilion, Grundriss und Aufriss / ground plan and elevation



Pavillon

Patricia Lambertus

»zweijahrtausendfern«



