

# Paramnesia - Andreas Albrechtsen

Andreas Albrechtsen's new work explores the conceptual pair memory/oblivion. In *Calibergraphy* he utilises the frottage technique to raise a monument to European violence; in the related work *Writers Block* he shows fragments from 26 years of graffiti painting on the remnants of the Berlin Wall; *Projections II-III* present a situation in which the famous Rorschach test is employed, and in *Untitled (White Lie)* he creates something that may be construed as the reconstruction of a disjointed history.

All of this may be understood in terms of *Nachträglichkeit*, a psychoanalytical concept for describing how we deal with and alter the memory of an experience in order to bear it. In this context there is yet another term that applies to Albrechtsen's project, *the screen memory*. This is a phenomenon that occurs in connection with traumatic events, causing us to remember only harmless details such as the pattern of a tablecloth or a slightly drooping curtain.

Memory thus helps us to forget.

One of the functions of the Rorschach test is to access these memories indirectly by starting a process of association triggered by an "innocuous" image. The strange thing about *Projections II-III* is that the grain pattern of the table and the intricate twists of the psychologist's hair almost function like a screen memory. The subject of the test in the picture has been erased. The test image itself has been removed from its context. The two pictures, of which III was drawn after II, are almost an illustration of the concept of *displacement*, where one memory is replaced by another and less perilous one. The birds in the upper drawings are in their turn a displacement from the drawing *Projections I*, whose top picture shows a window with a bird sticker, which partly hides the scene that takes place in the room. (This earlier work does not form part of the exhibition).

The collected layers in *Writers Block* of 26 years of graffiti painting on the Berlin Wall are materialised oblivion. The wall itself is a paradoxical monument that shows up the traumatic German history by covering it. But Albrechtsen's main interest is not history, but historylessness, which is set off by these layers of overpaintings. *Calibergraphy* are frottages showing bullet holes from the Second World War in memorials or monuments. They are also superposed strata that urge us to remember. Frottage is, of course, a rubbing technique used mainly by archaeologists to bring out ancient, half forgotten or obliterated patterns and pictures. It is a revelatory technique. For Albrechtsen the technique is charged with yet another meaning. The frottage picture is exposed by rubbing. The picture is an immediate product of the artist's hand, directly, like an imprint. It is a picture but also a trace.

Technique always carries meaning in Albrechtsen's work. In *Untitled (White lie)* he works with charcoal because of its sculptural qualities. The charcoal is not rubbed into the paper, as in pencil drawings, but remains on top, as in a barely prominent bas-relief. The subject in the two drawings is a fragment of a relief from the Zeus Temple in Athens where centaurs and Greek heroes do battle. It is a symbol of the struggle between reason and unreason but Albrechtsen has manipulated and reconstructed the original photo so that the picture seems to represent a broken relief badly reassembled. He seems to want to show us that the original meaning has been lost. Western civilisation has turned out to be confused, and it is no longer possible to grasp what is reason and what is unreason. Even the pictures, in fact, seem to have fallen down towards the bottom of the sheet where they maintain a faltering dynamism.

We believe that we know what we remember and what we prefer to forget, collectively as well as individually. Andreas Albrechtsen shakes these beliefs and throws us into a state of healthy and necessary uncertainty. This is yet another of the potentials of art: forcing us away from self-righteous self-assuredness, forcing us to look at the things we do not want to see.

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