

Dance of Strands – The Order of Things

Thoughts on the exhibition *SEMI COLLAPSE* by Dave Grossmann

12.12.2020 – 23.1.2021

Chaos is a fertile breeding ground for the emergence of the new. Most people, however, are suspicious of it because it threatens their own habits and their self-created sets of rules. But chaos is not just chaos, for it always requires the observer's point of view, and above all openness and curiosity. For chaos carries within itself the guiding principles for new orders and is also – loosely paraphrased – a universe of undeciphered order(s). Applied mathematics and mathematical physics are advancing towards precisely this state of affairs – but have not yet penetrated through to the all-embracing explanatory formula.

When Dave Grossmann, born in 1989, devotes his full attention to Oriented Strand Board, a material not particularly conspicuous in art to date, this is due, among other things, to the fact that here chaos and order apparently lie close together, a fact that fascinates him as an inquiring artist. Aside from the beauty of wood as a material, with its brittle but also highly complex grains and tactile qualities, as a representative of the world around us, of fauna and flora, OSB as a material is a man-made thing, a cultural artefact.

The manufacture of this product itself, first developed by Armin Elmendorf in the USA in 1963, is an exciting undertaking. Compared to chipboard, which was developed in the 1930s by the German Max Himmelheber, OSB is notable for the visibility of its individual strands, which are between 1 and 2 mm thick and about 10-20 cm long. And this is also where Grossmann sees the exciting part of the production process, which takes material form in OSB's appearance: In three layers, the coarse, glue-steeped strands are vibrated and blown in different alignments onto the oversized conveyor belt before being compressed into a board. The strands are aligned in their 'flow'. However, individual strands turn side-on and change their direction, e.g. due to tilting in the dynamic process, and become a (random?) disruptive structural and visual feature.

Unlike the production process, in which the theoretically infinitely long board is soon portioned on the conveyor belt into transportable sizes of over 3 m in length, Grossmann confines himself to what he regards as the maximum edge length of 125 cm, since the strands would otherwise become disproportionately large in relation to the size of picture in the current series of works.

Rather than choose the 'best' boards, the artist engages with what awaits him in terms of constellations of strands. The visual and mental scanning of the individual panel (e.g. in the cut size of 45 x 33 cm) is his basis for deciding which of the countless strands he intends to visually develop into clusters. The disregarded strands are plastered over and, as a surface, form the foundation for further layers of paint. As irregular geometric forms, they correspond to the shapes of the exposed strands, transitioning their dynamic space into two

dimensions and suggesting the character of an all-over, i.e. the continuation into infinity beyond the physical pictorial space. A process of continuous dialogue arises in the creative process. Once exposed, the strands are given visual depth by darkening certain parts to suggest a front and a back, i.e. he creates areas of shade. Each choice of a coloured area demands a response with another coloured area until the picture 'clicks' and a balance has been found. At the same time, it is energised by the dynamically interlocking surfaces, some of which have delicate colour gradients, thus suggesting a perspective alignment within a plane. In the interplay of the colour spaces (mostly in shades of blue and grey, as well as in black and pink), it is hard to tell what is in front and what behind. A game of confusion par excellence. The highlighted wood strands obey their own logic from the OSB panel's production process. Additionally vitalised and seemingly three-dimensionally layered by the delicately applied areas of shade, they give rise to a bright firework of concentrated power, of a collapse or expansion. The suspended, frozen state of the dancing strands evokes energy and contemplation at the same time. SEMI COLLAPSE.

The dance draws the gaze into the picture so that the eye scans the tactile qualities of the various strands in a constant back and forth, as well as the accompanying, contrasting, but also embedding and image-stabilising aspects of the paint surfaces, and then comes to rest on the bare wall surface before immersing itself once again in the picture.

Grossmann's masterly approach to the picture is an original response to the wealth of experience he has amassed and refined (both intelligently and sensually) over four issues as the founder, mastermind, editor and creator of the outstandingly designed magazine KWER. One could also say that he has used these instructive years at the same time as a means of deepening and refining his stance as an artist in a process of self-study.*

But also his 'first life' as an urban contemporary dancer, who learned early on in his youth how to explore space dynamically and compositionally and to create exciting figures of movement. Here, too, there was already an interplay of extroverted energy and introverted contemplation. SEMI COLLAPSE can be read as an aesthetic subtotal of his still young (life) experience. A compelling materialised state of suspension that channels and focuses energy, pointing ahead without denying yesterday.

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* The first three issues were joint works by Dave Grossmann and Hartmut Friedrich.