

# An Anatomy of the World: the Art of Silvia Bächli

With her traces and fragments, Silvia Bächli explores and exhibits the world, or rather, its interstices. She offers an alternative approach to reality and redefines our way of looking. Her work is on show at the Pompidou Center's graphic arts galleries from November 7, 2007 to January 7, 2008.

■ Diverse and complex, the installations assembled by Silvia Bächli from her drawings fascinate the beholder by drawing the gaze into the meanders and corners of their configurations. These drawings present a wide variety of seemingly unrelated motifs such as body fragments, floral elements, crisscrossing lines and marks, grids laid out with varying degrees of orthodoxy and apparently abstract forms. These motifs are devoid of any notion of practicality, but gain accordingly in symbolic power. Their variety reflects Bächli's singularly active and effective attention and responsiveness to the world.

Free from any preconceived ideas about what might attract her attention or be materialized in her practice, the artist studies reality—or rather, her reality; the reality of her body and her movements, her displacements and itineraries, those little things that suddenly generate sensation and meaning; Above all, she gives voice to possibility and rules out nothing, except what is facile and spectacular.

After some twenty-five years of work, Bächli has attained a solid maturity which is confirmed by her tranquil manner and remarkable mastery of the extremely economical artistic language that she has established since the beginning of her career. The motifs have become clearer, less morphological but with greater depth and sureness of line. Likewise, her vocabulary has been timidly but precisely extended to photography, demonstrating the gradual broadening and complexification of her world of reference. Featuring perfectly serene, empty Nordic landscapes, the photos are always framed and structured with great rigor, neatly echoing the precision of the drawings.

## Sensorial digression

Bächli's compositions never constitute representations as such, but function, rather, as series of clues that force the mind and the gaze to undertake the mental work of recomposing things and the world, work that begins in a sensorial digression.

The mode of presentation involves assemblages and combinations either on walls or in vitrines. These displays assign equal importance to the positioning of things and to their actual qualities. It is their organization that gives the ensemble



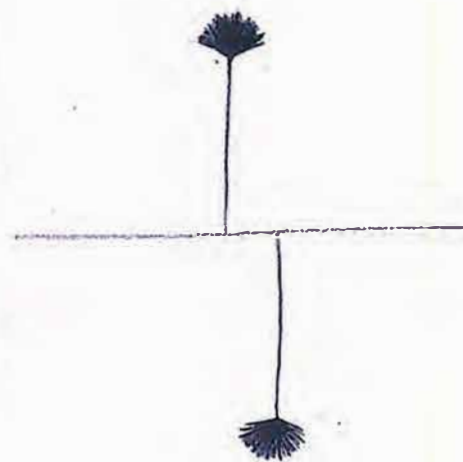
«Sans titre, n°26». 2007. Gouache / papier. 200 x 150 cm (Coll. privée). "Untitled." Gouache on paper

its coherence. This consists in the beginning of a narration made up of snatches and traces drawing both on the real and on fiction. The artist is perfectly aware of this dichotomy, and relates her own activity to that of a writer: "It is not exactly the real. It is much more interesting for me to broaden my world a little than to stick strictly to what has been seen or experienced." (1)

## Metaphor

This expansion of her world thus has as much to do with the figured content and the multiple connections it engenders as with the empty space around it, the spaces in which the gaze loses itself and digresses. Above all, the rigorous logic of these setups emerges when an attentive reading of the drawings also reveals the presence of a multitude of interstices and visual traps. When everything seems uncertain, and as delicious visual and semantic slips come to the surface. The artist has little taste for sweeping lines and direct traces, and is more inclined to invite us into an intermediary zone made up of cast shadows, ambiguous figures and motifs whose wholeness eludes us. Her use of words is indicative of this. These too may appear in ambiguous forms, like the vocable "TOT," which could be both an abstract expression and a simple set of letters from the alphabet.

As for the fragmentation of the installation, it comes across as a pertinent, effective metaphor of the fragmentation characteristic of our perception of reality. That of a quotidian composed of



«Sans titre». 1993. Crayon gras / papier. 21,8 x 15 cm (Collection privée). "Untitled." Crayon on paper

ubiquitous, diluted visual signs, giving the illusion of a surfeit of information the better to camouflage the paradoxical void of meaning produced by saturation.

The very nature of the artist's work, by the very multiplication of visual instances that it presents and the particular sensibility it conveys, in fact helps us to go through and beyond segmentation. The consequence is that it manages to reinsert content, by obliging the viewer to go and look for it, and even capture it, during the time of contemplation and of the attempt at construction that inevitably occurs, beyond surfaces and sometimes deceptive appearances. Silvia Bächli probes the world sensitively yet penetratingly, seeking to make it visible through a poetry of the almost-perceptible, of what we can perceive only in the light of doubt, of what is conducive to suggestion and untrammelled imagination. With the delicacy of her unfixed contents, always in-between, in a process of possible becoming or probable shifting, she helps us to redefine our way of seeing and, by her renewed attention to things, encourages us to look differently at what is around us. ■

Translation,  
C. Penwarden

(1) Interview with the author in Paris on March 28, 2007.

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