

## Island Me: A Series by Jens Hanke

In *Island Me*, artist Jens Hanke continues his work in the medium of drawing, but not without increasingly integrating approaches that verge on painting. In a kind of continuation of the series *Mining Ground*, *Digging Field* and *Synapsale Nachbilder* from 2009 and 2011, he has now created a series of drawings that often surpass the usual format of a drawing or print.

The visual spaces have become larger, taking up as much as three sheets, so that when assembled together they develop a decidedly monumental aspect. This effect of unspeakable size was already inherent in the older series, where it was often difficult to judge the dimensions and the relations of what is “represented.” The “objects” or “figurations,” often only rudimentarily defined, can be interpreted as microscopically small or megalomaniacal huge structures, even if it is only rarely possible to make a clear statement about the actual nature of what is depicted.

With *Island Me*, Jens Hanke remains true to the genre of imaginary landscapes. Both the title of the series as well as the titles of the individual drawings indicate that the subjectivity of the artist plays an important role in the process of creation. At issue is not the depiction of an external, visible world that can be rationally grasped; emotional impulses and autobiographical reflections come forward. *Island Me*, one’s own isolated identity, refers not only to the artistic creator. The beholder is also left alone in the inanimate scenario, thrown back onto his or her own sensations.

Not only the size of some of the works is new: his approach to the material used—drawing charcoal—is also more experimental. The work *Open Up the Gates* lives from playing with construction and blurring. Precise lines allow a complex weir system to appear that holds back the energy of masses of water behind it—yet (as the title suggests) soon to release it. The construction of the drawing is accordingly dynamic. By applying the charcoal in various densities, clearly defined realms emerge: other spots almost disappear by way of erasing or blurring. The questionable reality of the depicted is once again placed under question, promoting a highly painterly, no longer merely linear impact. Despite the double disillusionment of the absurdly constructed and what is revealed to be drawing, a spatial draw into the depths of the image cannot be avoided. The gestural blurring seems still to amplify our personal implication.

Additional works advance the dissolution of the visual space still further. The drawing *Decisions Were Made at a Much Higher Level* for example divorces the visual space from the task of visual depiction. A horizon is at best alluded to, a spatial staggering is rather sketched out by way of the web of lines. Although a classical image construction of front, center, and

background is suggested, this drawing also seems to indicate what it is: rubbings on paper that only obtain a spatial order in the head of the beholder.

The works in several parts in particular are an exciting innovation in Jens Hanke's oeuvre. Wall filling works have frequently been part of his work (in part in collaboration with Ulrike Dornis). But new here is the physical draw that exudes from the work *Island Me*, for example. Promoted by the dimensions of the drawing and a suggestive visual structure that recalls baroque vedutas from a bird's eye view: the beholder loses the ground beneath his feet. It almost seems as if, freed from earthly gravity, one is sucked into the expanse of visual space. And what variety can be found there! A terraced landscape that recalls strip mining, revealing grave wounds. But it has lost nothing of its primeval force. Whether natural or created design, the environments depicted appear to be dangerous. Structures that vaguely recall technical devices seem to place themselves dangerously in the way on our journey into the image. Can a collision be avoided? Will we be able to fly or will we crash down?

What awaits us in Jens Hanke's drawings is anything but harmless. But the palpable energy and formal as well as the thematic tension that comes to bear in the drawings is incredibly exciting.

Dr. Martin Steffens

Translated by Brian Currid