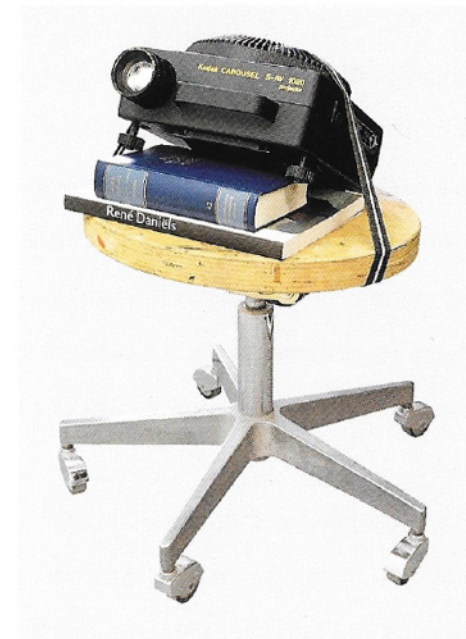


## Anke Völk: Fictions of anarchy

In his much-cited story “Del rigor en la ciencia”<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges talks about a highly developed civilisation creating a map of the same size as the country it describes. The map covers the country completely. But that is not the end of story. With the decline of this advanced civilisation the map falls apart and becomes the residence of the socially declassé and those who never belonged to the country’s society: “In the western deserts, tattered fragments of the map are still to be found, sheltering an occasional beast or beggar; in the whole nation, no other relic is left of the discipline of geography.”<sup>2</sup> Here the animals are no witnesses of an untouched paradise. They represent a surviving life form that doesn’t define itself by victory, for they take over non-triumphantly what has been given up already.

Anke Völk’s series of paintings dated between 2000–2002 shows imaginable fictions of this takeover: eagles, lizards, vultures, spiders cover canvasses and walls. On painted surfaces the artist projects slide reproductions of illustrated pages taken from animal books, which can be perceived as remains of the map. These projections combine two varying traditions in transferring knowledge: the tradition of the popular animal book beginning with “Das Illustrierte Thierleben” by Alfred Edmund Brehm in 1863, and the use of slide positives for scientific discipline since the end of the 19th century. The animals seem to stand on the remains of this map of pictures and texts, which was produced to describe their appearance and way of life as precisely as possible.

In her paintings Anke Völk creates a vast distance to the scientific methods of explaining and grasping the world. She paints creatures which would settle in the



uncanny areas of an imaginable psycho-geography of the animal world. She may be seen in the aesthetic tradition of *gothic sublime*, the sublime of horror, as Edmund Burke defined it.<sup>3</sup> By taking text fragments such as “*Die hier sichtbaren langen Krallen des Merlins ...*” (The visible long claws of Merlin ...) out of the scientific context and using them as a title for her painting, she creates uncanny moments also on a linguistic level. The artist transforms scientific-objective descriptions into the beginning of a new narration with an undetermined ending. Her stories of pictures and words shake the faith in the connection of seeing and knowing. They suggest the existence of a world unrecorded by scientific descriptions.

The population of her paintings and videos consists of creatures which were not domesticated. They have escaped being standardized and optimized as working animals. Eagle, lizard, vulture, spider are counterparts of domestication and the usability of the living. They could be regarded as anarchists who won't tolerate neither God nor master above themselves. But like the settlement after the end of civilisation, these animals' freedom is one without triumph, for the creatures lack the basic ability to “indignation (...) against every divine and human, against every collective and individual authority” – as the anarchist Michail Bakunin put it.<sup>4</sup> The beasts are the projection screens for our idea of border crossing and freedom.

In both her abstract work and in her paintings with animal motives Anke Völk produces the violation of rules. She doesn't content herself to the square of the canvas. She paints and sprays beyond it on the wall which holds it, or uses the wall directly as painting ground. By projecting slides or abstract light patterns she integrates and occupies the whole showroom. By this working method she withdraws her works from the classical consumability of the easel painting which is portable, for sale and might be exhibited again in an identical form. She combines various painting styles and media as video, slide projection, painting and relief. She also makes use of a spray can – an instrument still being perceived as a tool to disturb the order of public space.

The animal motives integrated in Völk's latest work refer to the liberation from cultural norms. Yet her working method is the play with the rules, not their abolition, by which she creates a high aesthetical complexity: The artist integrates the history of painting and the tradition of the scientific picture. The books supporting her slide projectors represent this canon metaphori-

cally. But Anke Völk does not bet on a rhetoric of provocation as a moment of avant-garde. By overstepping both materialistic coherence and the painting's space she shows that fascination lies within the violation of the rules, not in the lack of rules. She demonstrates that an artist's essential ability consists of two motions: confronting boundaries and, even more, the talent to imagine the form of a world that could lie beyond them.

Anke Völk moves inside the complex rules of the history of painting and makes them perceptible – by sensitive fictions of anarchy.

*Margit Rosen*

1 "Del rigor en la ciencia", in: Los Anales de Buenos Aires, Year 1, no. 3, 03/1946, p. 53

2 republished within the story "A Universal History of Infamy", here quoted from Gesammelte Werke, Band 6, München: Hanser, 1982, p. 121

3 Edmund Burke, Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1759 (1757)

4 Michail Bakunin, Gott und der Staat, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1969, p. 141

