

Between fragility and force.

On the paper works by Ilse Pierard

How complex is the core of life, how complex its representation? In her artistic paper works Belgian artist Ilse Pierard focusses on the abstracted form of a cell, the basic and the smallest unit of life. Her intriguing paper collages in their reduced oval shape are an ode to the cell, this overwhelmingly powerful organic construct.

Applied to this very elementary topic this simple handicraft technique turns into an artistic fathoming of the innermost significance of life. The elementariness of the subject echoes its abstract representation echoes the simplicity of the material echoes the simple artistic practice. In her working process, she explores a wide range of everyday handicraft paper and wrapping material: transparent paper, silk paper as well as craft paper, metal foil or cellophane sheet. The underlay consists repeatedly of found vintage paper and carton from flea markets. Accepting wear marks alongside the edges and corners - traces of use and handling - the artist emphasizes their fragility and liveliness.

Besides being a familiar, inexpensive every day material, the used paper sorts all have different material characteristics such as surface textures, different grades of stiffness and transparency. The variable treatments of the paper or adapt to its nature or on the contrary brings it to its limits: Ilse tears, cuts, pierces, crumples, wrinkles the paper into creases and flattens it again, then adhering layer over layer of oval shaped paper sheets into poetically equated paper compositions hiding and at the same time revealing its inside.

The interplay of different materials one above the other - plain or crinkled - influences the appearance of the surface. Crinkled material creates a furrowed, vibrant skin; plain transparent paper has the effect of cool matt glass. Corresponding to its materiality the outer layer is opaque or translucent and can therefore serve as a more or less mantling yet promising veil of the layer underneath. The slight and careful adhesion of the layers allows the material to catch light, to respire and to stretch sculpturally into the space. Unframed the works seem to levitate on the wall, others - framed by the artist herself - allow the moving viewer only a sneak a peek under the work's tails. Still the core bears a precious secret emblematic to what moves all our being.

The treasures inside Ilse's cells represent the complex capacities of biological cells and therefore also a whole range of scientific research in this field: the stupefying ability for self-reproduction

and regeneration, the storing of information and maybe even memory, the capability to absorb and emit selectively molecules, to obtain and produce energy – all these stunning powers are inherent in each of the 50 trillion cells in our body. How to represent all this complexity and the truth within artistically? How to transport the positive bearing and beauty of the cell as core of life?

Corresponding to the variety of cell types there lies an ample variety in Ilse's works. Differing in size, material, color and treatment of the paper, the works vary between the small cheeky cells of the "Cell sequence" that builds a colorful block and bigger single cells with a noble core of gold foil. The oval shape remains the recurrent theme of the cell series, always recalling the eternal circle of being. Corresponding to this Pierard elaborates an ongoing series of "Circles" that are generated in conjunction with mediation. The circles are executed in one concentrated movement of a brush. The strong acrylic color at the circle's core contrasts with the dark edge of natural bister.

Paper is one of the oldest artistic mediums, it bears the character of a naturally fabricated matter even if it's industrially produced without any trace of plant fibers. Ilse Pierard's work consolidates different global traditions ranging from water color and drawing to applied arts such as book binding, printing, paper cutting since the 19th century and other popular paper craft techniques. Paper not as medium but as material entered the high art stage in assemblage and collage works of the avant-garde movements. Juxtaposing heterogeneous images and referring to political and social developments Dada turned significantly the art world inside out. Since the 1950s paper was staged in the art world in its pure material characteristics and aesthetic appearance.

Ilse transforms all these traditional threads into her distinct artistic expression. Her concern is to represent the timeless aesthetic harmony and beauty of an existential truth with a simple yet intense distillate of artistic material and language. This truth was there long long before artistic experiments. Iconographically Ilse's work is linked to the history of scientific visualization. Since the positivist tendencies in 19th century mankind made many attempts to represent the principles that move the world. Ilse made it.

