

The Center is Located on the Periphery

On Susanne Rottenbacher's Bodies of Light

With today's technology, roughly fifty million galaxies can be seen from earth. Yet not a single one is as close to us as Susanne Rottenbacher's light installations. Of course these require a mechanism to overcome the evils of gravity, but, in an imaginary sense, they are floating weightlessly in the void, each one by itself and yet all in spatial relationship to one another, each oriented around an imaginary center point, but ultimately all peripheral phenomena. They are cool objects—cool in spirit and cool in their aesthetic—that not only articulate the fear of the void in their own way, but also satirize it unreservedly.

"Ugh," wrote Max Beckmann once, and this ugh was a shudder from the depths of the soul, "this unending void, whose foreground we constantly have to fill up with stuff of some sort in order not to notice its horrifying depth so much. (...) This boundless forsakenness in eternity. This being alone."

Why "stuff of some sort" à la Beckman ask Susanne Rottenbacher's bodies of light? We simply obscure the negation with the immaterial, with transparent bodies, with floating lightness, elegantly curved around a black hole. We refrain from the sovereignty of interpretation, reserve for us at all times the option of defining only ourselves, and, in our lavish and mysterious beauty, also grant you viewers the freedom to grasp us as symbols of yourselves: each man is a universe, evidently self-determined, some high flying, some grounded, all circling around one's own self and scattered around the room at random. In the end, perhaps it is you who obscure the view into nothingness that is so difficult to bear.

It is enticing how Susanne Rottenbacher's bodies of light seem to meet the viewer halfway. Their transparency is seductive and inspires trust. But don't they also constantly demonstrate the ambivalent nature of this transparency? They imply comprehensibility, guarantee a view of what lies behind, which does not exist—not for lack of meaningful content, but due to an awareness that lurking behind all objects is a familiarity with solitude.

These objects do not need us. In truth they are anonymous. They do not even need the space around them, since they are what first constitutes this space. And in the end, it is as it always is. What emanates autonomy, strikes us as exceedingly desirable.

Boris von Brauchitsch