

maria volk
eingriffe in den geist

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The mind, the intellect, the subconscious, human cognition and reason. The ability to imagine. The mental faculties that govern our actions and our decisions. From Plato, Descartes and Spinoza to 19th century empiricism and 20th century behaviorism, cognitive science and beyond: contemplating the mind has been and continues to be an inseparable part of our attempt to simply understand.

An ambiguous amalgam of memories, thoughts, instincts, feelings and neural connections that compose our characters in various proportions. Conditioned by experience and social norms? Affected by organic processes like chemical balances or, as many a self-help best-seller preach, by a healthy life-style? Or should the mind and body only be considered as a single entity, as is the case in both ancient Eastern philosophy and current neuroscience?

Maria Volk's large-scale artworks stem from a mental process that reveals the artist's forays into her own mind. The ability to imagine led enlightenment rationalists to categorize the mind as an independently existing substance. Maria Volk, however, channels the imagery produced by the subconscious and revealed to her in dreams through her body and onto the artwork. It is an automatic way of painting which, much like her automatic writing, attempts to allow the movements of the hand to produce the images without censorship or interference from conscious thought. This specific fashion of connecting with the intellect leaves the originator of the work with an impression of an ur-piece unfiltered by external aesthetic considerations.

How is it possible to transfer these forays into the mind onto the canvas? Letting the images remain as they are, undeterred by external censoring, requires discipline. Not only mental but also physical conditioning is necessary, such as loosening the hand and letting the wrist follow its patterns of movement. Reaching this level of unhinged, unconscious, and unreflective movement can also be considered an end in and of itself, achieved through endless repetition. In this sense, this work process invokes the art of Japanese calligraphy, where the artist begins to feel the letters by means of repetition, the movement of the hand retracing the form of the sign over and over again. Perfection remains a goal to strive towards even if the criteria for judging remains elusive.

Alongside her drawings, Volk also produces texts with the process of automatic writing. These are collected, together with the drawings that are copied over and over again, into fanfolds. Here too, repetition becomes a recurring motif in the work. Indeed, the work-process is itself an apt and oftentimes literal reflection of a dualistic gap that has been bridged. Volk first draws sketches of both the abstract and figurative forms invoked from within. She then uses acrylic and color pigments to dab the motifs on sheets of paper. The paint is subsequently reprinted on nettle cloth by means of pressing the papers against it. It is a quick process - dynamic and uninhibited. It only seems fitting that the image of a girl whose head is protected or rather hidden by an umbrella appears as a recurring motif. The handle of the umbrella shoots up into an umbrella-shaped cloud, creating a straight channel between the image's wrist and the mind - and ultimately between the work's content and the artist's approach.

Text: Hili Perlson