

## Theatres of the Mind

In the series, Theatres of the mind, the natural scene becomes a natural stage. After the portholes, the telephoto lens, the binoculars, the View-Master, the diorama or panorama, the artist offers us a glimpse of a kind of theatrical space onto which the viewers can project their psychodramas or in which they can situate their inner characters. To this end, he offers only minimal clues or loose frameworks. The décor is composed of rough and suggestive spots and brushstrokes but appears, at times – through the presence of a number of artefacts – to have meaning. This is the mystery in its purest form: it makes clear that it has meaning, but not what its meaning is.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud speaks of *der andere Schauplatz* (the other scene). It is the place of psychic reality and the unconscious. It has to be distinguished from external reality. According to him, it defines more than our ultimate thoughts and dreams, our acts and omissions. In her eponymous book, contemporary psychoanalyst Joyce Mc Dougall discusses the Theatres of the mind. This inner scene is the stage onto which repetitive scenarios are played out, scenarios that are rooted in (what we imagine to be) our childhood and willingly or unwillingly affect how we experience or live our life. In a more daring sense, we could even make the transition from mind to brain. More specifically to the orbitofrontal cortex or the part of our brain located behind and above our eye sockets. Is this not the nerve centre par excellence that houses a mentalising ability and theory of mind that distinguishes us from our animal brothers and sisters? How similar in appearance are the neocortical neurons and dendrites to the slender stems and thin branches of Peters' (main characters: the) trees? And what of the organic twists and biomorphic turns of the painted décor? It presents, in this last series, clearer signs of human presence and even traces of culture, even if man, as such, remains physically absent. In the first work, for example, we are confronted with a sort of abandoned paradise. The tree of knowledge of good and evil stands idly by. It has lost its meaning. Some apples have fallen to the ground, the result of gravity's mindless pull. What remains is the melancholy sight of faded glory. Adam and Eve have literally disappeared from the scene. Other works in this series evoke biblical references as well. One of them shows an uprooted trunk. It looks like a cadaver or a decapitated skeleton. In front of the scene, there are mirrors or a removable panel. It is a kind of C.S.I. It reminds me of a famous saying of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Leopold Szondi, 'Kain regiert die Welt' or in more common language: 'homo homini lupus', man is a wolf to man.

In contrast to the simple fore and background in Staged views, Theatres of the mind open the view onto a sort of arena or battleground. The crevasse has become a disk, a concave disc, more specifically. It is a shape that can act as a container for the most diverse of contents. It is like the inside of a vase that is sculpted to, at times, contain emptiness, at others, a variety of 'substances'. The stage is like an open place in a forest of paint. Sometimes, set within it, there are rootless trees. As if they were able to walk across the stage. Young and old, men and women seem engaged in conversation or are steeped over, as if looking for contact or confrontation. Peters carefully traces their slow choreography. It all seems very allegorical, but what does it allude to? Trees are not trees, shrubs are not shrubs, shadows are not shadows. The imagination is stimulated in an artful manner, yet the representation remains unsaturated, so that anyone can add, or infuse it with, their own meaning.

Appearing, here and there in Peters' paintings, is an increasing number of props. A swing or climbing wall refer explicitly to a childlike universe. Sawn boards are explicitly of human origin. Similarly, a box can contain anything. No matter how closed it may be. Peters leaves its possible content entirely open. Does Peters aim to point us in a certain direction or rather lead us astray? Another work shows cheerless party lights, uselessly hung between trees. Set up as if for a party that never took place or never will take place. Fernando Pessoa: 'On the eve of never departing...'. The framing created by means of an impenetrable thicket of artefacts blocks the access yet also invites transgression. The tonal colour in this kind of work is rather more emotional than perceptual. It obeys the logic of T.S. Eliot's 'objective correlative', in which the judicious collection of all details aims to generate a specific affective response. Much like the tragedy, the works in this series – rather than evoking a sense of the uncanny – affect a catharsis.

At times, his work is indeed rather more ironic or narrative. The picture, then, depicts both history and/or his story. As stated by G.W.F. Hegel, there are things in the world with a nature and things with a history. Here and there, in the spirit of the Natural History Museum, Stefan Peters manages to bridge the gap between the two. Although he consistently remains a View-Master, one who, through his series, tells us of his view.

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