

Katharina Wendler in conversation with Jürgen Krause

Email Berlin / Frankfurt am Main, August–September 2018

*KW: Dear Jürgen, I'd like to begin our conversation with the question at what time you got up this morning and what your daily work routine looks like.
How many hours do you dedicate to work every day? Do you follow a fixed procedure?*

JK: I like to start work early. Sometimes I will write down how and when I'd like to begin the next day. And this will be meticulously clocked: 5.32 am getting up, first coat of primer, 5.50 until 6.20 am papercut work, then sharpening tools. At 6.35 am the chequered freehand drawing, I spend about an hour on that. After that sharpening of the pencils that will no longer be used and a second coat of primer... It is as if I'd already do the various works mentally. But then I never adhere to the timeline strictly and for very long. Today, for example, I found a note from yesterday on the desk, a quote by John Cage ("My present way of composing's involved with the observation of imperfections in the paper upon which I happen to be writing") and got into writing and drawing over the writings. But from this wild periphery of scribbling one can easily turn back into the rather strict direction of recurring day-to-day activities. So, sometimes it's strict when I need stability, sometimes easy-going, it depends.

*KW: Since several years you've been working on work cycles that demand a high degree of perseverance and concentration. For example, you cut circles into paper with a scalpel so precisely they look like punch holes (Papercut Works, 1999-today), or you draw ultra-precise lines by hand so that drawings emerge that are hardly distinguishable from machine-made graph paper (Freehand Drawings, 1998-today).
The end results are similar to things that "already exist", so to speak: graph paper and hole punch confetti, both products of industrially manufactured office supplies.
What exactly did interest you about this form? (If it was simply about precision you might as well be cutting off thin strips or cutting out rectangles.)
Is it also about provoking confusion in the viewer?*

JK: With graph paper one doesn't wonder if it is beautiful or not. The network of lines solely serves as orientation when writing and calculating and does not in itself reveal anything special. It's neither about composition nor taste. The focus may be on the freehand drawing of lines within a strict standardization, without aids. Lines that are as straight and taut as possible but at the same time loose. So loose and effortless that they almost originate from thoughtlessness. Since many years I practice that almost every day and become more and more familiar with pencil and paper and how I stand there at the desk while drawing. Graphically I adhere to a form that "already exists" and in the end produce an image of myself.

*KW: So it's not about imitating something that already exists (and as faithfully as possible) but about perfecting the activity itself through continuous practice.
This practice – do you refer to it as a performative act? Does your performance matter for contemplating your works?*

JK: Yes, the term ‘imitation’ is alien to me in this regard. I draw my own lines, every single one as a personal mark. I only adopt the fixed measurements from graph paper. This rigid classification system – I adopt it and at the same time express myself within it as freely as possible. Or “loosely”, as I called it before. I don’t think about perfection or an ideal line with this, there would be no life in it. It is rather about an “approximation”: to continuously approximate, to be in close proximity. Then a current flows. When making a freehand drawing I try to be “in the current”. The order of actions is clear: Before the first line I sharpen knife and pencil. After every line drawn I step aside and sharpen the pencil again. I mind my breathing, how I hold and handle the pencil. This is accurately balanced. A process that developed over time. Not really a performance, there are no spectators present. Nor is it being documented.

KW: *Talking about your art adds a new dimension to your works that otherwise would remain hidden from the viewers. In doing so, your way of working, your method, but also your materials and tools become more comprehensible and the picture of the artist Jürgen Krause becomes complete. At the same time your works with their minimalist nature and in all their clarity firmly stand for themselves and ultimately need no explanation. How important is it for you to provide information about your work process?*

JK: Every now and then I talk about what’s behind it. On a different level, it can fill up the work, extend it. The need for precision and clarity is great though. And again and again I realize how difficult it is to form and express a truly independent idea. Or to simply and naturally carry out a task. It needs time. And all these digressions are part of it, making for something like an enhancement in the first place. I follow this path all the time, from chaos to order, to then break up the order again. Also this writing, it is actually writing, deleting and approaching anew. And waiting. To leave the sentences standing for a while. Seizing a “waiting position”: doesn’t that mean to keep one’s distance while at the same time still to be engaged?

This waiting also exists with drawing: when the white paper is already cropped to an A4 format, when knife and pencil are sharpened. The pencil lead touches the paper. At that moment preparation and execution coincide. What would it be like to pause there and to rely on the world entering into the pencil tip? I encountered the idea in Chinese ink painting that the world enters the brush tip. But after all my daily practice is different, I’m always in action. Sometimes an activity is useful for another – sharpening the knife in order to cut – sometimes it’s done for its own sake, as pure ritual. This is then like “treading water” or “waiting while doing”. The task is practiced for its own sake, the knife continually sharpened. Until the blade is ground away at one point.

KW: *For the series Walks (1998-2004) you did leave your workspace and walked along the lines of longitude and latitude from the Main to the Mediterranean Sea for example. When walking you follow cartographically given but invisible lines and ignore geographical conditions that we usually orientate towards, like national borders or altitude differences. Is this walking along a clear line – similar to when drawing – about the movement within a classification system within which you are seeking freedom? Did you document the walks in any way?*

JK: For me the walks are closely connected to the drawings. I made the first drawing in autumn 1998 (and will show it for the first time at Åplus) when I had just returned from the first of the four walks. I set out following the discovery that Mainz, my place of study, as well as Pilszcz, a small village in Upper Silesia where my father’s family originates from, are both located exactly on the 50th parallel north. My grandmother had told me how she experienced the war and the years after, also the escape to Lake Constance. So I started out on foot with a huge backpack. I was travelling for six weeks,

always towards the East, mostly without a map, I followed the course of the sun. I didn't see the walking as art. But during the following three walks towards West, North and South I paid more and more attention to the interplay between the exact line on the map and my own line in the landscape. For the last walk along the 10th meridian east from the river Main across the Alps towards the Mediterranean Sea I took a GPS device. For these walks eventually a map was developed with only little information: the map grid of longitudes and altitudes, the ways walked on foot, and the national borders for orientation. Nothing else. What had happened on the road, the joy of walking, the hardship of walking, the landscapes, the encounters – it all remains absent.

After all this time of being on the road moving on with backpack and tent, I began to build a "house", a place to stay, so to speak. For this I laid a first cornerstone at the crossing point of the paths walked in the Gramschatz forest. It contains a copper capsule with contemporary testimonies. I issued the construction permit with the coordinates of the place myself. More foundation stones followed, so far there are thirteen. Most of them in Germany, one in France, another one in Japan. I sank the last one into Lake Constance, where it now lies aground at a depth of 250 metres. A house of first stones, not habitable in the traditional sense.

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KW: In this way you mark places and create an imaginary house, or a "place to stay", as you call it. Do you also follow a clear structure with these isolated interventions, or how do you select the locations?

JK: They can be places with a special appeal, like the Altkönig in Taunus. I have been up there many times and at one point I knew the exact place and the convenient time for laying the first stone. Near Lascaux in France I inserted the time capsule above a cave entrance straight into the rock. A borrowed stone, so to speak. At the moment I am thinking about three more stones, one of them from marble: as the walk southward ended in the bay of Carrara where the famous quarries are.

KW: It seems to me that a large part of your work takes place within the realm of the invisible, be it the free spaces between the lines that you draw, or the cut-out puncher circles that leave behind gaps, or the temporal spaces that pass during your sharpening procedures, or the weeklong walks that are undocumented, or the foundation stones that are being left behind in the soil unnoticed. How important is it for you after all to create something permanent?

JK: The image of the sharpened pencil ready for drawing is enough...

Jürgen Krause (born 1971 in Tettngang, lives and works in Frankfurt am Main) studied Fine Art at the Akademie für Bildende Künste Mainz with Klaus Vogelgesang and at Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main with Thomas Bayrle. Exhibitions, amongst others, at Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Museen Haus Lange Haus Esters / Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Port 25, Mannheim, Kunstverein Ludwigshafen, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Kupferstichkabinett Dresden, Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Kunstverein Leipzig, Kunstverein Heidelberg as well as at Kunstmuseum Wiesbaden.

<http://www.juergenkrause.info/>

Katharina Wendler (born 1988 in Hamburg, lives and works in Berlin) is an art historian and exhibition maker. She currently works as Artistic Associate at the Faculty of Art and Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar as well as a freelance curator and author in Berlin. She studied cultural studies, art management and psychology at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg as well as art history at the University of Iceland and Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. From 2013 to 2017 she was Director of the project space Safn Berlin/Reykjavik and since 2014 has realised and coordinated numerous exhibitions, publications and other projects with German and international artists.

In early 2018 she initiated the exhibition format *in conversation with*, that takes as its goal to bring people into conversation and thus into collaboration. Artists are invited to enter into dialogue and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are formulated into texts and serve to accompany the exhibitions as text material. They enable the visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the working methods of the artist and their artworks.

in conversation with is based on the assumption that artists themselves are best able to provide information about their works, their working methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask.

<https://www.katharinawendler.com/>

Exhibition

Jürgen Krause

397 Handzeichnungen, 4 Wanderungen [397 Freehand Drawings, 4 Walks]

September 28 – October 26, 2018

Opening: Friday, September 28, 6–9 pm

Äplus, Stromstraße 38, 10551 Berlin

