

Anne Neukamp

Reinhard Spieler Painted Ur-Sonatas

Wim Wenders's 1993 film *Faraway, So Close!*, a continuation of his famous film *Wings of Desire* (1987), deals with the relationship between intimacy and distance. An angel observes the fates of humanity from afar and finds them unsatisfying since he cannot intervene; his intervention would immediately transform him into a human being, who would then be threatened with failure due to his temporality and transience.

Intimacy and distance—familiar shapes that still seem utterly foreign—have also been the subject of Anne Neukamp's paintings in recent years. In her usually large-format paintings, the artist operates consistently with shapes, signs, and structures resembling logos or pictograms that seem very familiar from advertising, the world of commodities, and from public repertoires like instruction manuals, schematically simplified device drawings, or other applied graphics. On the one hand, we know the signs themselves: percent signs (Mark, 2013), stylized hands (Pépité, 2013; Juggler, 2015), euro signs (Untitled, 2013), black-red-gold stripes (Untitled, 2014), telephone receivers (Faux Amis, 2015), envelopes (Inveiglement, 2017), keys (Picklock, 2017), and quotation marks (Rumor, 2017), to name but a few.

On the other hand, the mode of depiction is also familiar: the highly stylized, schematizing representation that creates three-dimensionality using light-shadow contrasts has been quite popular since the advent of Pop Art and is now used everywhere; we know the computer-graphic depiction of the telephone receiver, which in *Faux Amis* is combined with a different style of depicting the same motif; and we also know the device of repetition from countless contexts of our daily visual language, which since it was pointedly used by Andy Warhol has entered our everyday visual world. *Progression* (2016), *Leverage* (2017), *Languet* (2014), and many other works play with similar devices of repetition.

We actually already know the mode of representation that Neukamp usually uses for her backgrounds from Color Field painting: sometimes they are two broad surfaces that are highly reminiscent of Mark Rothko's visual statements (*Double*, 2013), sometimes they are dirty, monochromatic color surfaces that are familiar from the work of Robert Rauschenberg. Other paintings work with contoured color surfaces, as developed by Ellsworth Kelly (*Gamble*, 2013). If we wanted to systematically sum up the arsenal of forms, symbols, and design in Neukamp's art, we might say that the artist takes us by the hand using familiar visual patterns from the everyday world of applied graphic design—low—and from the rather elitist art world of Minimalism and Conceptualism—high—only then to catapult us entirely into a no-man's-land of unknown images and leave us utterly alone with our tools of perception.

As well-known and familiar individual visual elements may seem, the combinations have little connection to the familiar and already known. This begins with the emphatic isolation of elements. A key, for example, is only depicted with its central shaft, while the key tooth, which is actually essential for the object to function, is replaced by a differently designed graphic pattern that undermines the objective reading and places it in question (Picklock). Instead of filling a keyhole with a key, Neukamp uses an abstract sculptural shape that only vaguely alludes to the hollow cavity of the lock but does not correspond to the pattern of a key (Imprévu, 2018). The separation of units of meaning is made clearest perhaps in Chart (2019), which depicts a plastic bottle for holding liquids, and beside it a splash of a fluid that does not, as would seem obvious, appear in connection to the bottle, but is instead completely independent and repeated three times as an ornamental, abstract structure distributed across the picture surface. Linkages of meaning are intentionally divided up, and the components are staged as independent structures.

There is a system behind Neukamp's disruptive principle of montage. Fluids are combined with solids, flat things with sculptural things, figuration with abstract forms, high and low, form and content, thus radically breaking up units of meaning and taking them to absurd lengths. On a systematic level, Neukamp's image inventions can be compared to Kurt Schwitters's collages. Just as Schwitters used elements from an all-too-familiar world of everyday life—newspaper cuttings, calendar pages, admission tickets, and various scraps—that he arranged and combined in completely new ways, Neukamp takes components from advertising, the world of graphic design, and art history, that she then reassembles in a new formation that is completely foreign to the system. Both practices result in something new in an aesthetic, visual sense as well as in terms of content. Although the individual parts might seem familiar to the beholder, the image as a whole is terra incognita, a cosmos of fully unfamiliar forms and new combinations of signs. Familiar forms are transformed into awkward, puzzling formations, but elude all previously known interpretations or meanings. Although we know the letters of the design alphabet, we are forced to learn—and even develop—an entirely new language with them. Anne Neukamp's paintings are painted ur-sonatas in the spirit of Kurt Schwitters: freed of the semantics of (visual) language, they develop their power by means of formal sound, through reverberating overtones and undertones of former meaning that in archaic poetry free themselves from the corset of explanation and determination, instead opening up new worlds of experience. It is a world of experience beyond intimacy and distance, beyond the familiar and the unknown, a world between angels and humans, far away, so close!