

Stefan Waibel: *Ideal Nature Machine(s)*

“No such paradises are to be found in reality as have glowed on the canvas of Claude [Lorrain]. [...] In short, no position can be attained on the wide surface of the natural earth, from which an artistical eye, looking steadily, will not find matter of offence in what is termed the “composition” of the landscape. “ - that’s what Edgar Allan Poe’s visitor of the “ideal” landscape architecture of the *Domain of Arnheim* pondered in 1847. Even though the “the component parts” of a natural landscape “defy individually, the highest skill of the artist, the arrangement of these parts” will still always “be susceptible of improvement” by the artist.

These lines on the relationship between art, the artist and nature by E.A. Poe and are not devoid of irony. In the meantime, since the beginning industrial age in which E. A. Poe lived, this relationship has grown to become a “global” misunderstanding between civilization and nature. In the course of an “improvement” of nature that no longer “aesthetically forms” but “improves” nature by techno-economically (de)constructing it and making it disappear more and more as a grown landscape, artificial worlds of high- tech- based (indoor) amusement and theme parks spring up like mushrooms in conurbations...

Stefan Waibel has been treating the precarious relationship between human beings and nature as a priority for years, and just like E.A. Poe, he applies (critical) irony. In his latest series “Ideal Nature Machine” (begun in 2008) he first uses “illusion” as a traditional means for depicting reality in art: In dark rooms colorfully glowing flowers and grass are swaying with the wind, fabulously over-dimensional like in *Alice in Wonderland*. Sometimes even a dragonfly-like animal sits down on one of the plants. As observers we feel drawn into these three-dimensional, macroscopic pieces of lawn of the present that invite us to contemplate them like a cornfield in the wind.

The definition of an “ideal machine” in physics is that all processes are reversible and no energy is lost (because of turbulence or friction etc.). Thus, its entire system always remains in equilibrium. How wonderfully should an “Ideal Nature Machine” work! Doesn’t it promise to solve the problem of incompatibility between the languages of nature and technology? After the first glimpses of his installation that promise such coincidences, Stefan Waibel brings us back down to earth for two reasons: Firstly, it is the little word “ideal” in the title of his work that refers to the merely idealistic conception of such a machine (just like the “ideal machine” that does not exist per se for the reason that natural processes are always *irreversible*) and secondly, we will soon after our entering his “wonderland” find out that its individual components do not really “defy the highest skill of the artist” but are simply made of iron, aluminum and epoxy resin color and brought to life by fans and UV light. The artist himself states that these fans “... use a lot of energy. The entire machine actually turns against the nature it depicts ...”

Thus, disillusionment comes on the heels of illusion – which, in turn, makes Stefan Waibel’s *Ideal Nature Machine(s)* (artistically) work: They become “devices” for creating aesthetic- sensual enjoyment and evoke reflecting thoughts on a topic that is of constant and highest relevance - especially in this day and age.

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