

Black Garden (ATEM/META, 2004)



ATEM – META
Felix-Nussbaum-Haus,
Installation auf dem Dach
der Villa Schlicker und
in der Galerie Anette Röhr,
Osnabrück 2004

“Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site. My works never decorate, illustrate or depict a site.

The specificity of site-oriented works means that they are conceived for, dependent on and inseparable from their location. Scale, size and placement of sculptural elements result from an analysis of the particular environmental components of a given context. The preliminary analysis of a given site takes into consideration not only formal but social and political characteristics of the site. Site-specific works invariably manifest a value judgement about the larger social and political context of which they are part. Based on the interdependence of work and site, site-specific works address the content and context of their site critically.”

Richard Serra, The Yale Lecture, 1990¹

In 1999 during the preparation of the exhibition “3 Räume – 3 Flüsse”², Susanne Tunn sent two postcards to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium. Both postcards contained a schematic drawing of the junction of the rivers Werra and Fulda and bore traces of water. Susanne Tunn had undoubtedly put the card in the water of one of the three rivers of the city of Hann. Münden. The picturesque historic centre of Hann. Münden is very suitable for sending picture-postcards, but Susanne Tunn did not send a picture-postcard with historically nostalgic yearning, she sent her experience, her sense of time, her identity in relation to a place to the museum.

However well I remember this almost ritual and simultaneously ordinary action or act, Susanne Tunn’s contribution to the exhibition “3 Räume – 3 Flüsse” actually contains a totally different work. Susanne Tunn is a sculptor with an analytic eye for space, time, opaqueness, material, growth, shape and place. In addition to a video installation (“Cor”, 2000) she developed the sculpture “Loh” for this exhibition in Hann. Münden. Her numerous visits to this city finally took her to an empty site on Lohstraße: an up to 40 cm high remaining fragment of cellar foundations that had become grown over by two to seven year old trees. The artist did not change the site-specific situation of the property but relates it to the physical presence of the city’s rivers. She manifests this with an oversized concrete slab set at an angle on the foundations and poured towards the rivers. Circular holes in the concrete slab allow the trees to keep growing. This monolithic table – and the meaning of the table in Susanne Tun’s work could be the theme of several essays - reminds me of the gesture of the postcards from Hann. Münden as well as the current work situation in the premises of the Felix Nussbaum-Haus of the Kulturgeschichtliche Museum, which Susanne Tunn has chosen for the realisation of the work “ATEM”.

Susanne Tunn did not have to send a postcard in Osnabrück. She was not confronted with the presence of natural forces but with two other determinantly present elements: the current judgment of an architect, who realised an architecture which is a sculpture, monument, museum, biography as well as an architecture and the tormented artistic works and destroyed life of the artist Felix Nussbaum and his wife, the painter Felka Plateck. Daniel Libeskind's perfect sculptural "mass" and Felix Nussbaum's torn life make Susanne flee or escape to the flat roof platform on Villa Schlikker.

Instead of entering into a confrontation with the brutal reality of earth, Susanne Tunn seeks the sky and light. But she takes the earth up with her in the form of briquettes – industrially manufactured blocks of coal. These briquettes become building stones for cylinders which are spread out over the roof platform in aleatory and static patterns. Towers are built on the roof. Signs or totems that grow and change during the period of the exhibition. The roof turns into the construction site of a dark landscape paradise or – to put it in Susanne Tunn's words – into a black heavenly garden.

If the trees have guaranteed growth or a change over time in the work "Loh", it is now the artist's regular interventions which actually breathe new life into this work. In almost six months "ATEM" will change, get used to the surroundings and be subject to natural forces. With "ATEM" Susanne Tunn creates a landscape or a relief. The roof platform of the Schlikker villa is turned into the 'genius loci' or spirit of the place. It is a precisely selected location to which the artist relates her sculptural search. It is not a place that is found after wandering around for a long time, as was the case with Susanne Tunn's project "5 Tische"³. The roof platform is rather a stage of sculptural affects and relations, an artistic laboratory in mid-air.

In Susanne Tunn's practical sculptural work, it is very seldom that the artist builds or constructs. In reality she is usually confronted with stones varying in type, age and structure.

In the process she attempts to discover over long periods of time how the real skin and the body of a stone can be revealed. Additive or constructive processes are rarely present. With ATEM Susanne Tunn is involved with the material in a different way. New constellations and relationships are built stone by stone every time. Relations are created between the view of the sculpture from below and the experience of being on the roof platform in the middle of the "landscape". Dialogues develop between the constructed components and the overall appearance of ATEM Distance and closeness, transparency and opaqueness, shape and shell, time, climate and change are the sculptural parameters of this work.

While ATEM will remain on site for more than half a year, the parallel project META in Galerie Anette Röhr will capture the exhibition room for a shorter period. Just like the anagram META has the same letters as ATEM Susanne Tunn uses the same material here as well. In the closeness of the gallery room, two Meta cylinders made of briquettes are built up to the ceiling. Both objects act like obstacles in the room, as dark absorbent objects reminiscent of their landscaped counterpart on the roof of Villa Schlikker. The works META and ATEM are similar not only with regard to the material used. More important is the precise and accurate perception which Susanne Tunn employs to develop her works in both cases. It is not the perception of a photographer who celebrated the moment. Her perception is tactile, synchronous, time-conscious, inert and synaesthetic. In ATEM and in META Susanne Tunn's sculptural perception

builds full-scale columns. On the one hand columns as part of an architecture of the sky, on the other hand columns as potential (protection) space for people and their history. The cylinders of both works are containers of space, light, reflections, time and air from within and without. Concurrently, these columns embody the attitude and thoughts of an artist who consistently attempts to question and to investigate the topicality and necessity of sculpture in art and in our society.

Philippe Van Cauteren, Hamburg, February 2004

¹ Richard Serra, "The Yale Lecture" 1990, in: *Art theory in the 20th century, Volume 2*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit, pages 1395-1399.

² "3 Räume – 3 Flüsse" was an exhibition which took place in Hann.Münden from 1998 – 2000. The exhibition was curated by Jan Hoet, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium at the time. 18 international artists were invited to develop a site-specific work in relation to the omnipresence of water and the three rivers in Hann. Münden: Fulda, Werra, Weser.

³ In 1989 Susanne Tunn began the project "5 Tische". After a period of more than 15 years, the project is concluded with the work "Tisch für zwie paare und einen Hund". The previously realised tables are called: "Tisch des Denkens" (1989-1991), "Tisch der Wüste" (1991-1992), "Tisch des Meeres" (1990-1999) and "Tisch des Berges" (2001),