

Birgit Knoechl

Nervous sculptures

The soft tissue of many leaves has decomposed by the end of a long, dry winter. What remains is the nerve skeleton, a fragile system of veins through which nutrients are supplied during more fertile periods of the years. Even so the former leaf is usually still recognisable in the faded tracery of ribs and nerves. Austrian artist Birgit Knoechl pares all manners of vegetative forms back to a flamboyant almost rampant interplay of lines executed in ink. Virtually nothing of her penmanship is lost when she translates her drawings into paper sculptures, but the growth in spatiality is explosive.

Proliferation

Out of control – the autonomy of growth is the name Birgit Knoechl (Vienna, 1974) has given to several of her installations in which the sculptures proliferate furiously in the corner of a space. It seems only a question of time before the space is so overgrown no one can enter. A good subtitle for another installation is *vegetal_conspiracy!* It is as if the malignant plants from *The Day of the Triffids* (book, film and TV series) have returned. In 2008 Birgit Knoechl presented her *hybrid archiv I-LXXX* comprising a collection of 80 cut_out sketches of plant and pseudo-plant forms. The illustrations by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) made for his *Kunstformen der Natur* (Art Forms of Nature) served as a source of inspiration. Knoechl's cut_outs are preserved one by one behind glass like dried flowers and arranged together like a database for closer examination. Knoechl produces her cut_outs with very little: paper, (black) ink and a sharp knife is all she needs. While she deliberately displays her archive of cut_outs on a flat surface, the spatial works fan out luxuriantly in every possible direction. The sculptures – because this is what they are – inhabiting her installations can reach several metres in size. In musical terms a capriccio is jittery, restless piece, lively and fairly free in form.

It is a description that can also be – continuing in the musical vein – transposed to Knoechl's cut_out work. The already fanciful nature of her drawing style is reinforced by that fact that the extremities of the hanging plants bend and arch in all directions and even intertwine with each other. Not only the play of shadows created by the open structure, but also the use of just black and white, or red in the case of *cut_reds*, intensify the exuberance. In her piece *plant_lab* – again a title so true to the nature of the work – Birgit Knoechl steadily works towards a position of autonomy, which could be a reflection of a world without human intervention.

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