

Helga Kreuzritter Excavates Anthropomorphic Topologies

On encountering the work of the German artist Helga Kreuzritter, who studied at the Kreynhop School, in Hamburg, and has exhibited throughout Europe, one is immediately put in mind of the evocative old phrase "the human clay." For Kreuzritter's figures are so basic as to appear formed from the earth itself in her mixed media works recently seen at Agora Gallery 415 West Broadway in SoHo.

Describing her theme as "aspects of the interplay between man and nature with nature as the winner," Kreuzritter creates thickly textured surfaces akin to bas-relief in



"The Crowd"

which terrains appear anthropomorphize to a degree that landscape and the figure are virtually indistinguishable. One of the most dramatic examples is in her mixed media piece "Agora." One can only assume that the title of this work being identical to that of the gallery it was shown in is merely coincidental, since the word, which derives from the ancient Hebrew, actually means a "gathering place," and Kreuzritter's work depicts a ghost village, abandoned long ago by an African tribe. The configuration of the village is circular and is built up in relief in Kreuzritter's usual manner, which involves the application of gouache and mixed media in many layers. The forms of the dwellings and storage places within the circular village have an eerie, haunted quality, suggesting some ritual configuration of

human skulls in a desert, with their openings resembling gaping mouths and eye-sockets. The eerie effect is enhanced by the shadows Kreuzritter's raised forms create on the earthy surface of the piece. Thus the structures of the village itself evoke a ghostly presence of its former inhabitants. Here, as in other pieces by Kreuzritter, nature is indeed the "winner," having prevailed to "capture back the land, devastating man's artificial constructions," as the artist herself puts it, leaving little doubt as to what side she is on in this eternal struggle.

The artist's perception of naturally formed faces in the rocks in a canyon provided inspiration for another powerful mixed media work called "The Crowd," where many masklike visages showing an extraordinary range of emotions emerge

from yet another earthy ground. Here one is put in mind of those amazing pictures one has seen in magazines such as The Smithsonian and National Geographic of mummified figures lined up in caves or catacombs only to be discovered by archeologists several centuries later. Kreuzritter invests each face with its own unique personality and emotional subtlety, registering fear, astonishment and a wide range of other emotions, even while she constructs them in her tactile materials with skull-like simplicity. And, again, the

sculptural quality of her forms results in shadows on the surface of the piece that enhance the dramatic effect of the composition.

The interplay of humankind and nature has been an ongoing subject for Helga Kreuzritter, who has explored it successfully not only in mixed media works but also in gouaches where her technique was somewhat more traditional and two-dimensional. In works such as "Agora" and "The Crowd," however, the theme is realized even more evocatively by virtue of Kreuzritter's earthy, textured materials, which become tactile surrogates for actual, rugged topologies and imbue her compositions with greater depth.

—Marie R. Pagano

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