

ANITA TRAVERSO GALLERY

PAMELA RATAJ *Netz* – catalogue essay



PAMELA RATAJ's artistic practice pivots on interrogating human constructs such as the nature of linear time and linguistic structures. Her works investigate thought systems and the propensity of western culture to divide and segment the whole in order to commodify, contain or control it.

As a German immigrant who moved to Australia at a young age, the abstract and somewhat arbitrary nature of human language became increasingly apparent. Being multilingual enabled her to recognise the cultural shifts in modes of perception as well as the seemingly random assignment of names to objects and things. Concurrently, this loss of language contributed to a personal sense of cultural displacement or diaspora.

RATAJ employs a series of visual frameworks across an array of artistic disciplines from which to hang these ideas. Frequently appearing as interlocking structural arrangements, networks, matrixes or as a series, the frameworks have a tendency to become interrupted, fragmented or unfixed.

In earlier paintings such as *Faisceaux 1*, 2012, from *The Morphology of Forgetting* series, the form of writhing tree branches provides a structural cue for the visualisation of letting go. There is a visible disentanglement that occurs progressively across the picture plane, a cutting of the proverbial umbilical cord. The sense of loss for mourned parents is palpable.

In her new series of paintings entitled *Netz*, 2012, a matrix that resembles cracked parched earth is used to reorganise the picture plane. Muted tones of peach and inky blue extend across the surface, dissolving at the edges. With this gesture, RATAJ resists the predetermined compositional structure as designated by the perimeters of the frame. Letters extricate themselves from the networks that contains them, becoming unfixed from their delineated boundaries they take flight. These pictorial devices provide a visual commentary on the fallibility of language, illustrating the chasm between the socially designated assignment of a word and the essence of that object itself, of the gap between terminology and meaning.

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Artistic materials are often selected for their physical attributes such as the quality of malleability; to be woven, bent or shaped. This decision is intended to analogue the ability of human culture to influence structures in our external surroundings and is evident in the wrapping or binding process seen in the sculptural leather masks of *Untitled, (Mute)* 2012.

In *Baum*, 2012, a leather bound tree floats on a circular mirror, evocative of continuity and the infinite. In this work **RATAJ** eloquently expresses the ability for language to have a dual functionality — that of both obscuring and revealing meaning. The translucent material of the two glass domes espouses this sense of both revelation and containment. An array of painted letters free float like liberated dictionary escapees, inferring the vast possibilities of language.

Anna Briers
Independent Art Curator and Writer
Melbourne 2012

IMAGES:

First page : Pamela Rataj *Netz 1* 2012 acrylic, ink, oil on canvas 76x153cm

This page : Pamela Rataj *Seven songs for point p* 2012 leather, ink, wax 27x14x16cm

This page : Pamela Rataj *Seven songs for point p* series 2012 leather, ink, wax 27x14x16cm (each)

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