

## The Line That Speaks – Dan Perjovschi's "Naked Drawings"

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Anyone who expects something salacious or perhaps thinks even of nudity when reading the title "Naked Drawings" is going to be disappointed by Dan Perjovschi. Neither was the artist naked as he committed his drawings to paper or onto the walls, nor do the drawings depict naked bodies.

What is naked is the line. Reduced to the essentials, it is black and slender, has a beginning and an end, a direction and a progression. It has ups and downs, odd corners, rough edges, curves, and sometimes even gaps. Yet mostly it knows which way it is going, even if sometimes it briefly hesitates, falters, searches, and finally to catch up again. It is quick, hasn't a moment to lose, for it is part of a larger whole in which every line has a very definite place and purpose. Each and every one of them allows this whole to emerge and thus reveals itself in all its nakedness.

No less naked is the idea that the draughtsman has as he traces the line. The idea is likewise compact, concentrated, is epigrammatic and, even though it is part of a development, always has a beginning and an end. Perjovschi allows the beholder to join in his straightforward thinking and thus continues its lines out into space. This is thinking in self-defence that flies out at us as hard and abrupt as a punch, that is never lost for inspiration or a wicked sense of humour, and is disrespectful, disorderly, unguarded. Naked thinking, without any to-do, always provisional, always with the times or ahead of them, but only by five minutes.

Compared to painting and above all sculpture, drawing has always been regarded as the most

immediate of artistic media. And it is still among the fastest. A pencil, a pad – the simplicity of the means allows an idea to be rendered in a swift, largely unfiltered way. Unlike photography, video or computer graphics, the drawing makes do without elaborate equipment. Which means it has something raw, fresh, and convincing about it. To this day people draw sketches in courts in order to provide a quick, insightful document of the proceedings. Anyone who wishes to help a stranger grasp a complicated matter or idea, or to find a place, does a quick scribble rather than give a circuitous explanation. All that one needs is a ballpoint and paper, a blackboard, a bare wall, or if need be the sandy ground or a drop of wine poured onto a table.

Dan Perjovschi has deliberately chosen the medium of drawing – as a speedy method for speedy interventions, even though he has the classical tools of the visual arts at his command. He trained at the George Enescu Art School in Iasi and became a painter. But with the collapse of Ceaușescu's dictatorship he questioned and reconsidered his artistic approach. It was time to jettison the ballast. Time to find his own voice. "I had to get back to the moment while in the 7th or 8th grade (I was fourteen years old) when I did cartoons for my colleagues (about us, about teachers), and they laughed so hard they were forever getting expelled from the classroom. I was having great success. I was communicating! So after twelve years of academic training it took me about another ten to get rid of the education and get back to cartoonish expression."\*

He grew suspicious at that time of the ostentations of traditional panel painting: it had worked too long in the service of power-wielding and intimidation. The painting conveys nothing but itself and the power of those who give the commissions. But in drawing he sees the possibility of communicating and artistically expressing himself without having to be like the high and mighty, or as small as they like others to be. Drawing comes from the individual and belongs to everyone. Drawing is a matter of the moment. Drawing is a gift, a communiqué, a picture postcard. Drawing is as simple and naked, as direct and immediate as the revolution. The plain and simple line enables it to remain political, without puffing itself up as political representation.

Perjovschi's sketches are not in the tradition of political drawing that stretches from Otto Dix via Käthe Kollwitz to Alfred Hrdlicka. They are free of the pathos of hatching and shading, of forced wit and agitation, and likewise dispense with ornament and nuances. They leave out the details because they themselves are details of a lively political mind. For they are not aimed at saying everything at once.

Simultaneously this means that no one drawing is the "best" and capable of explaining all the others. Only in combination do the links become apparent, the associations arise, and their genesis in a given place and moment ousts the eternal values. Nervousness, which has always characterised political thought, is their fuel. "I walk along the streets, I drink a coffee, I watch TV, I talk with you, and then my drawings come spontaneously. I store them in my note book..."

Perjovschi draws on the popular forms of newspaper cartoons and comics for his often unpopular truths. He reads newspapers and makes newspapers. He lives in a world of the mass media and their sometimes trivial, sometimes bizarre products. But how is one to say anything about the world that rises up over them? The conceit of the bourgeois artists is as alien to Perjovschi as their escapes into nebulous realms. He does not scorn the punchline, which adds a touch of levity to his serious subjects. For the punchline is the bait.

No drawing without a punchline – and no punchline without writing. Many of his figures

only work as a result of the comments he jots down on them. In this way they are charged with a meaning that disconcerts. At the same time writing allows an absolute reduction to certain basic, constantly recurring forms, to *primitives*. A square only becomes a window, a room or a sign, once his writing has given it that function, or a person only first becomes an "artist", "curator", "president", a Putin, Bush, or Angela, when the appropriate profession, the appropriate name stands above the anonymous humanoid form.

The writing is an integral and necessary part of the drawing, for it consists of the same thin black lines and expresses the artist's same naked thoughts. Sometimes it is barely legible, sometimes it is crossed out when the artist has thought differently of it, but the mental process can always be understood. It admits to failures and uncertainties just like the person who wrote it.

Thus word and image are good friends and mutually relieve one another of a lot of work. But as is to be expected from such a political person as Perjovschi, they are completely emancipated. The picture does not dictate or designate what the words have to say, nor the words the image, and as in the best flat-sharing situations small squabbles naturally arise. "Line is important, and the childish, rough, ugly features are intentional... they give me the freedom to destroy, change, mix or construct the content. But what I am really interested in is condensing a complex issue into a few lines. My revolution happens there in the 10 x 10 cm drawing." Perjovschi's line speaks, but for that same reason it sometimes interrupts the word, which for its part may then scrawl its way across the figure like a spider.

And both can become independent. The writing becomes autonomous when it is simply a note, or when the image develops directly from it. China, India, the USA stand there as powerful block capitals, "CHINA USA INDIA", and in between – reflecting its population and dimensions – "Europe" in tiny letters, but issuing from it an enormous speech bubble: "Listen... Guys..." An abstract acrostic transforms into a concrete, trumpeting vehicle: "CDU-u-u-u", while the U and the O of UNO swell up to be-

come round heads. Impromptu concrete poetry.

The image becomes autonomous when meaning arises from its own forms and figures. A thought bubble turns into a rainy cloud, a speech bubble into a battering ram, rounded brows multiply to become radar waves, the Opel signet reappears in the mouths of the laid-off workers. Once again, the absolute precondition for these divorces between figure and word is simplicity. Only what is simple can hold its own. Anything that cannot be shown in a few brief lines fails to find its way to the paper. And anything that grows beyond will never end up on the wall.

Thus the choice of drawings that the artist has made for the walls is anything but random. The criterion of simplicity used in their selection aims at a universal language of drawing. Regardless of whether the viewer has grown up in Tokyo or Transylvania, he or she will understand it.

The transfer from notebook to wall is, however, always done to fit the exhibition at hand. A process of condensation takes place, topic areas are delineated and developed, and to this are added the spatial, temporal, and even a perspectival dimension. The figures themselves and their lettering become tauter, more concise. But this selection simply marks out the foundations, the jam session is far from finished. "From the drawings in the book just 30% ends up on the wall, the rest is made directly on the wall... sometimes as a reaction to the public... the selection process requires a lot of thought. There are moments of intense thinking and moments of pure jazz."

The topics may just as easily be the Iraq war and the mini-job as the art war and the mini-artist. The bourgeois division between personal and political is not a part of Perjovschi's thinking. "Everything I see is linked after all with the way I see things, and with what has happened to me." Now that the great political doctrines of both the left and the right have been somewhat overtaken by reality, what nevertheless remains is the individual. He is unable to know everything, does not venture any prognoses, but is also loath to be a victim or a stooge.

The fact that he has lost faith in political science does not compel him to remain ignorant. Merely that his scepticism compels him to assess statements in the light of reality. Perjovschi's art teaches this flexibility in our thoughts and reactions. It teaches us to think and live in the present. And to abandon grand gestures and pompous analyses. Dan Perjovschi has the line that speaks yet promises nothing.

\* All citations originate from Dan Perjovschi's emails to the curator.

