

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Kerstin Brätsch

Die Sein: Para Psychics I
130 East 64th Street New York
April 28 – June 18, 2022

'The soil was a horizonless external gut–digestion and salvage everywhere–flocks of bacteria surfing on waves of electrical charge–chemical weather systems–subterranean highways–slimy infective embrace–seething intimate contact on all sides.'

– Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Lives*

Kerstin Brätsch began making the *Para-Psychics* (2020–2021) during prolonged periods of self-isolation in which the artist committed to a daily ritual or diaristic routine of visualizing one's own psychic realm. A long-standing interest in the mediumistic directly links this series of drawings to her earlier *Psychics* (2006-2008). While visiting fortune tellers, Brätsch was simultaneously beginning to explore the medium of painting itself, which she has continued to channel through other art forms, artisanal techniques, and collaborations since. Missing those social bonds, the *Para-Psychics* nevertheless symbolizes another form of clairvoyance, this time a move towards interiority.

Rendered in simple colored pencil, a kaleidoscopic array of softly shaded foliage-like forms, labyrinthine tubular tendrils, and angular, refracted shapes mutate, unfold, and coalesce on the surface of the paper. Here, the manifestation of inner, mental space is envisioned as a vividly baroque or ornamental metaphysics rather than, say, the artistic byproduct of the unconscious the result of psychic automatism. While there appears to be no discernable geometry, structure, or possible portraiture to these drawings, their composition could be thought of as perhaps akin to an 'architecture of roots' as described by Merlin Sheldrake in his study of Fungi, *Entangled Lives*. In this regard, Brätsch's arrangements are suitably rhizomatic given they share attributes below ground.

'For humans, identifying where one individual stops and another starts is not generally something we think about. It is usually taken for granted–within modern industrial societies, at least–that we start where our bodies begin and stop where our bodies end', writes Sheldrake. The *Para-Psychics* reject this straightforward, progressive narrative as well. Yet, within the transference of the biological to an ecology of the self, there remains inevitable remnants of the past dragged forth like sediment on a seabed. Figures occasionally appear in various states of becoming or disintegrating into their surroundings. Depictions of human anatomy are repeatedly splayed apart, dissected, sprouting and vegetative, or drained and ghostly. Some manifest as spectral, bodiless bodies reduced to what looks like floating arteries and organs. '[...] the grotesque image of the reordered body seems, on the surface, to be an extension of organic abstraction', writes Mike Kelley in *Foul Perfection: Thoughts on Caricature*, in a reminder that grottesca were first found in subterranean grottos in Ancient Rome, once favored by artists during the Renaissance.¹

Writing about reduction as a form of distortion in modernism, Kelley uses the example of J.G. Ballard's 1966 novel *The Crystal World* in which an ecological phenomenon causes rapid crystallization. This reduction is 'deadening and ultimately apocalyptic', leading to homogenization as well as a common condition in the Ballard's protagonists: the compulsion to depersonalize. Some of Brätsch's imagery is tinged with the crystalline as if touched by a similar cataclysmic process that

¹ Kelley, M., & Welchman, J. C. (2003). *Foul perfection: Essays and criticism*. MIT.

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was taking place outside concurrently. Yet the *Para-Psychics* resist inertia because they represent a collapsing of time rather than the linear procession of crystallization that solidifies it. In this sense, the artist's relationship to the exterior world is fundamentally diffuse like the network logic of Mycelium, 'better thought of not as a thing but as a process: an exploratory, irregular tendency', Brätsch channels hyper-connectivity with one's surroundings.

– Saim Demircan

For further information, please contact press@gladstonegallery.com
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