

## Mirjam Völker – Out of the Blue

Mirjam Völker works with paint, but she thinks three-dimensionally. In her large-format paintings, she creates scenarios that are almost photographically illuminated and situated between worlds in a reality peculiar to her pictures. In this reality, natural components and housing built by humans work together and against each other; this realm has its own laws of gravity and light, perspective and spatiality, reality and fantasy. Here scenes seem deceptively real and graspable or traversable, but this realism never conceals what it is: painting. In a constant interplay between dualisms – light and shadow, surface and volume, the constructed and the grown – the pictures are always based on the creation of an atmospheric impression, whereby provisional housing takes on the role of leitmotif and runs through her entire oeuvre. Common to these huts is that they no longer fulfill offer the function of offering protective shelter. Their promise of security shifts into something threatening.

These built constructions are often based on huts the artist photographed but are never a simple copy of reality. At their side, vegetative, grown constructions always also play a role, and these, too, are based on nature, but always aimed at a function: to support the composition, the aspect of ambivalence between maintenance and toppling.

The expression “Out of the Blue” designates something that happens abruptly and without warning, and is usually used in reference to unpleasant events. In the work with this title, the sky is ominously darkened in the background. A cloth mounted on one of the provisional wooden huts blows in the wind; a sudden storm may have disturbed its stillness. At the same time, the building is circled by beings reminiscent of the bodies of fish that seem somehow prehistoric. The roof of the hut is a banner with an urban architecture beneath a radiantly blue, bright sky in front of which a person or a sculpture stands on a pedestal – but on its head, because the scene is rotated 180 degrees. The steadfast pose turns into a leap into the unknown. What happens in this detail is also carried out in the picture as a whole: the proportions, the perspective, the incidence of the light – everything stands upside down and finds itself at a tipping point between air and water, sunlit day and dark night. A vortex arises in the center of the picture and could seize hold of the hut at any moment.

In Mirjam Völker’s pictures, human beings are present only as traces, as images, shadows, or in the form of printed words or objects of daily use that they have left behind. In *Out of the Blue*, the picture on the roof tarpaulin within the picture indicates proximity to civilization; in *Barricades*, fragments of words and letters do that. Together with the pictures’ titles, they pose riddles rather than telling a story, leaving their origin as open as their geographical or temporal location. The interplay between people and nature always plays out, but it is left unclear whether the human being with his housing displaces the natural structures, or vice versa. The background of *Barricades* is dominated by a reddish smoke, perhaps from a fire, but its origin – whether made by humans or caused by nature – remains literally in a fog.

The interweaving of the built and the grown is also expressed in the work *Cut Back*. While the title implies the action or pruning trees, here it appears as if the pruned tree has taken back control by growing through the shed made of thin slats. Its branches break through openings and walls even where there aren’t really any, and here Mirjam Völker’s dealing with transparencies and the laws of spatiality that she herself writes become especially notable. In reality, the trial of strength between tree and human is determined by her; she decides which branch may grow, which bears

drastically cut surfaces, what directions they grow in, and what their relationship to the foreground and background is, whether they grow plastically almost beyond the pictorial space or merge almost transparently with the painted sheet metal and other construction materials. Just as the human being builds his housing to gain protection from the weather and other external influences, Mirjam Völker “builds” her trees and bushes, giving them an order, direction, and a function, only to repeatedly be surprised by the life of their own.

Leonie Pfennig