

FRANZ GERTSCH

Franz Gertsch is considered one of the most important contemporary Swiss artists. With his hyper-realistic painting and his woodcuts, which are unique both in technique and size, he has acquired an outstanding reputation well beyond Swiss borders. Between his international breakthrough at the documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972, and the presentation of his work at the Venice Biennale in 1999, a rich pictorial and graphic work has emerged, showing a very unique approach to reality.

Reality to Franz Gertsch means not only a pictorial, but also a conceptual challenge. Although his work originates from photographs or slide projections, the pictures go on to follow their own inherent logic aiming at an absolute accord of all elements.

Unlike the American painters of photo-realism, he uses a brush instead of a spray gun. The purity of the material used is rather complex: be it the colors (often made of minerals such as lapis lazuli, azurite and malachite), the binding agents, or the canvas or hand-made Japanese paper, everything is chosen carefully so as to result in perfect harmony within the final piece. His action is close to a large part of the European painting tradition - from Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci to Caspar David Friedrich and Ferdinand Hodler - without betraying modernity.

Franz Gertsch's woodcut works are considered absolutely unique. In an unprecedented precision of cutting and printing of monumental larger than life-size formats Gertsch pushes what is feasible in paper production to the limits and has opened a whole new dimension for this very traditional medium.

This exceptional work has not lacked recognition. Large exhibitions, for instance in the museum of Modern Art in New York, in Kyoto, Berlin, London, etc. bear witness to this esteem. Franz Gertsch is represented in German and American museums. In Switzerland, however, we have seen comparatively little of him so far. The collections of the Kunsthaus Zurich and the Berner Kunstmuseum cannot be regarded as representative. With the Franz Gertsch Museum in Burgdorf, situated not far from his residence and place of work in Rüscheegg, his outstanding oeuvre is effectively appreciated.