

# A Curious Person's Dream

## Maria Thurn und Taxis

It is by creating something otherworldly, an escape, a release, that Maria Thurn und Taxis generously gives the viewer access to her internal landscape, from which she has developed a unique visual language. At her studio we discuss Baudelaire, specifically "dreams of an inquisitive person" from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857. The poem crystallises at once a playfulness, as well as a dystopian feeling. At first glance I assume the intimate works on paper that recall Surrealist assemblages are perhaps studies and yet, as you come closer, you realise that these are works with their own force, colour fields and multiple perspectives. She is playing with expectation and reality and continually asserts this duality that runs through her work. Though clearly two-dimensional paintings and collages Thurn und Taxis explores in a sculptural way.

These small works on paper are so arresting that they immediately engage you with their familiar unfamiliar qualities, with the unashamed juxtaposition of beauty, rich inky pools of colour next to grotesque source materials. As I write this I can see the cyclops eye staring at the viewer in a small but highly intense work (*Truth Seeker Study*, 2019) that recalls Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, the *Cadavre Exquis* and some extremely scientific snake lexicon...the eye draws you into the sinuous body of the reptiles as they go round and twist and turn only to bring you back up to the eye that originally drew you in; all the while you are seduced by the snakeskin patterns and the beautiful manner in which they slide one on top of the other and at moments side by side harmoniously co-existing with the one ever watchful eye.

These assemblages though with wildly different "subjects" seem to relate to one another more than they do anything in the "real world". Thurn und Taxis tells me that she is inspired by Artificial Intelligence and the scope for computers and technology to create new paths and visual vocabularies. The surrealists blazed the trail here with automatic drawing and automatic writing and I believe Thurn und Taxis is striking out in a similarly unfamiliar way appropriating visuals to communicate from another world that is not before or after or even a dream but a parallel reality that flits in and out of consciousness. The mask has been a favoured motif for Thurn und Taxis and when asked about this she mentions the idea of presenting one way and being another and this opportunity for deception or masquerade. She mentions that though this might sound personal or subjective it is of course deeply universal and again this duality asserts itself.

*Cadavre Exquis* has long fascinated me since the show at the Drawing Center, New York in 1996; the element of

chance is so literal and the results so wildly unselfconscious and it seems Thurn und Taxis is aping this great parlour game to great effect. These two works *A Curious Dream I and II*, 2019 demand attention on account of sheer size and the audacious manner in which the artist again centres the energy with the creature itself and boldly surrounds it with blank paper whereby underscoring the three dimensional element of the totem. Of course, the *Cadavre Exquis* is a form of collective creation wherein each artist or contributor adds an aspect to a piece, sometimes without knowing most of the prior elements. In this way, this eclectic collection that makes up *Cadavre Exquis* evokes what can come from radically different offerings in the same collective space.

*A Curious Dream I + II*, 2019 seem to act as guardians and gatekeepers at the entrance to the playful and demonic world of Thurn und Taxis. These works identify as totems and as such are imbued with a sense of mysticism and power that feels other worldly and protective. The artist is indeed interested in a sense of spirituality and at least in upbringing was exposed to a traditional sense of religion and today relates to an idea of another power and dimension threading through our lives. These vertical works are made up of motif-based juxtapositions where the gaze is not always frontal and in this way the works align with the Native American totems and of course the cubist interest in multiple perspective. There is a strong protective energy that the works communicate with a vertical power centre. I particularly enjoyed the monkey and mushroom combination; again it is a Thurn und Taxis language that by the time I leave the studio makes complete sense.

Dualities of existence are captured beautifully in *Les Fleurs Du Mal* between the present reality and the dreamy possibility of escape. Whereas the escape in *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is final, in her work Thurn und Taxis provides a chance for temporal escape to a place that for her is not fanciful but real, sliding in between the spaces of our actual lives. Perhaps as Camus asserted in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942), the human situation is essentially absurd.

Dida Tait

London, February 2020

# GRISEBACH

# Maria Thurn und Taxis

Born 1980 in Regensburg. Lives and works in London.

2010

Fine Art, City and Guilds of London Art School.

2007

Camberwell College of Art & Chelsea College of Art and Design.

Documentary Filmmakers Group & London Film Academy (Filmmaking Diploma).

2005

Bachelor in Film & Media, American University of Paris.

Selected Exhibitions, Presentations, Screenings

2019

**"Hypnagogia"**, Siegfried Contemporary, London (solo).

2018

**"Played"**, curated by Maria Thurn und Taxis, Sebastian Hoffmann; with Henny Acloque, Nigin Beck, John Bock, Bill Copley, FORT, Kate Groobey, Hanakam Schuller, Oda Jaune, Sandro Kopp, Alexander Laner, Romana Londi, Max Moosleitner, Sigmar Polke, Augustin Rebetez, Felix Rombach, Wieland Schönfelder, Christian Schwarzwald, Jerszy Seymour, Cindy Sherman, Alexandre Singh, Maria Thurn und Taxis, Philip Topolovac, Mark van Yetter, Hugo Wilson; Neulich an der Salzach, Salzburg (group show).

**"Mademoiselle"**, Oda Jaune, Laure Provost, Maria Thurn und Taxis, Anna Uddenberg et al.; Centre régional d'Art Contemporain Occitanie, Sète (group show).

2017

**"Gewök am Abend"**, Traklhaus, Salzburg (solo).

**"Center of the World"**, John Bock, Julius Deutschbauer, Lea Draeger, Benjamin Heisenberg, Bjørn Melhus, David Moises, Hajnal Németh, Isa Schmidlehner, Kerim Seiler, Diana Sprenger, Kei Takemura, Maria Thurn und Taxis in an environment by Christian Schwarzwald; EBENSBERGER, Salzburg (group show).

**"The Beast Within"**, Siegfried Contemporary/Chalet Mittelgaessli, Saanen (solo).

2016

**"Waywards"** ( films, paintings, drawings), EBENSBERGER, Berlin (solo).

**"Looking for Alice"** ( film, drawings), Galerie Patrick Ebensperger, Graz (solo).

2015

**"BERLINROMA ROMABERLIN"**, with Elisabetta Benassi, Alessandro Cicoria, Rà di Martino, Amélie Grözinger, Caroline Kryzecki, Philipp Lachenmann, Gemis Luciani, Bjørn Melhus, Olaf Nicolai, Andrea Sala, Peter Welz et al.; Galerie Patrick Ebensperger, Berlin (group show).

**"A painting show with works by"**, Galerie Patrick Ebensperger, Berlin (group show).

**"Alles was ich mag, fast"**, with Nevin Aladag, Norbert Bisky, Vanessa Beecroft, Tim Eitel, Jenny Holzer, Gerd Rohling, Maria von Thurn und Taxis et al.; curated by Philip Grözinger, André Odier; Schau Fenster Raum für Kunst, Berlin (group show).

2014

**"Shape Shifters (Cambia Formas)"**, with Jimena Croceri, Camilla Emmson; Galeria Slyzmud, Buenos Aires (group show).

**"Amerika: idea / fantasy / dream / myth / image"**, Camberwell Space, London (group show). Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sidney (group show).

**"Three Women"**, curated by Mark Gisbourne; with Bettina Krieg, Ilona Kálnoki; Galerie Patrick Ebensperger, Berlin.

2013

**"Trail"**, with Claas Gutsche, Wieland Payer; Galerie Rothamel, Erfurt (group show).

2012

**"Painting Rituals"**, Coldharbour London (group show).

2011

**"Paint Me A Drink"**, 20 Hoxton Square Projects, London (group show).

**"Property of The Kitsch Palace"**, The Muse Gallery, London (group show).

2010

**"Spirit Level 010"**, Go Modern Ltd, London (group show).