

Kunsthaus Glarus

EPIC TIME

Bonnie Camplin

May 27–August 19, 2018

The exhibition *EPIC TIME* presents an omnidirectional survey. Individual works function like puzzle pieces of an overall whole. Created is a complex web of content-related and visual connections. An invisible system reveals itself through various “access points”, each of which, in turn, allows connection to all other (access) points of the configuration. The result is a structure, similar to a neural network that connects different realities and figures. Bonnie Camplins (*1970, lives and works in London) work revolves around universal and complex themes concerning fundamental questions of being human (and of being an artist). The following is a conversation with the artist about the concept of the epic, presentiments, female and male figures, ageing and other temporalities and the agency of artworks.

Judith Welter: In the exhibition, various spatial and temporal geometries intersect. What is the principle at work with *EPIC TIME*? What is meant by that term?

Bonnie Camplin: A friend of mine noticed that I always think in terms of deep-time. In terms of thousands and thousands of years ago or hence. I locate myself not somewhere between industrialization and the 21st century, but somewhere between hundreds and thousands of years ago in the past and in the future. Deep-time has to do with the scope you find yourself inhabiting. It is about how you locate yourself and what your temporal reach is. Epic is relating to cycles and time spans.

The epic is also quite a humorous thing. It just blows your mind. It has been *epic. It has been beyond – beyond my comprehension and bigger than me*. It is how you frame your present – in an epic way. It is part of a drama. You won't know why that happened for another five, ten, twenty years. The present might make sense only in the future. You could also say, it can take you quite a long time to work out the “rhythm of the song”. When you are younger, it can go down and you think it is never going to come back again because you don't know the rhythm of the song. Whereas if you have been around for quite a while you have a better sense for cycles. That must just be what wisdom is. You can't read it in a book, you have to experience it through longevity. I find it amazing that longevity can give you energy because it is usually assumed that ageing is entropic. The image of the entropic of ageing I see as capitalist propaganda. The ageing process is about graduating to the next level of the game. So, invoking this principle of *Epic Time* is a source of energy. It is an “access technology”, which has to do with syntax. That is like the pattern of the song when you know what comes next.

JW: In looking at the individual works, but also the entire exhibition, time or rather different temporalities and times become visible. Your drawings, photographs and collages are timeless but can also be linked to the aesthetics of a certain time, cycle or period. You call it the “*1970s, 80s, 90s, the Noughties and Now-Time; aesthetic loop-the-loop-listening to the deep distant past, the zooming of far-future aeons.*” What are the meanings of these specific cycles?

BC: These periods of times are linked to the time span of my own biography. But its reach is stretched way into the far future and past. I have some access points. For example, a sort of 1970s Egyptian-style hieroglyph. I am definitely magnetized towards certain aesthetics of particular periods of this life. Even if related to a certain time-specific aesthetics, some of these drawings are “precog”-drawings, like for example the drawing *Aerogel in Boots* (2012). I noticed a few years ago that my drawn line is so much more confident when I am reaching into the dark. More than if I would draw something which is right in front of me. I am much better at observing glimpses of future forms than of reality around us. All of my life I had presentiment. What I previously interpreted as just imaginative psychedelic invented forms. At a certain point it occurred to me that they are observational drawings, observing glimpses of events in the far future. It is not simply a case of just made-up images.

JW: Addressing concepts of reality and consciousness is a primary focus of your work. You explore how we relate to and perceive our material circumstances, also human, and non-human entities. In a literal sense, the title *EPIC TIME* might suggest a reading of the exhibition as narrative. Maybe similar to a story that is both fantastic and uncanny, human and non-human, like in the universe of Philip K. Dick, who deals with similar interests. The work of Dick is also related to specific temporalities: his body of work represents the time period in which it was written. The books bear witness to their time, to American society between the 1950s and 1980s. On the other hand, Dick was interested in projecting these observations of his time, of human behaviour, systems of belief and, more concretely, his own personal experiences into a future, mainly dystopian world. He is describing a cycle of humanity in search of personal and collective salvation and was interested in gnostic concepts, for example, which can be traced back to ancient worlds. Another temporality in his work is determined by his excessive consumption of amphetamines

that dictated his speed of production, allowing him to write up to eighty pages a day. What storyline runs through your exhibition and which temporality underlies its production?

BC: Mine is an on-going work of speculative science-fiction. The story line is the adventures of a warrior princess. There is a temporality related to my own biography. I'm going to be fifty in two years. I am a student of the physical/metaphysical interface. My learning and my research ramped up in the last year. I realized why they wanted to wipe out the witches, especially the Crones who have had an upgrade in their cognitive abilities. Your scope for what a cycle is goes way bigger exponentially. It is like a Fibonacci spiral. I started to learn more about astronomy and astrology. All electricity is about cycles. All the planets are cycling in a geometric way. Since some time, I can get a clear picture of the structure of reality and how everything works. I have been initiated into that knowledge.

The geometries of the works shown are a partial view of my idiocosmos. Through it I can view consensus reality in a different way, a bigger picture. It's like *Powers of 10*, a film from 1977 created by the office of Charles and Ray Eames for IBM, which shows outer and inner perspectives. If you apply the same principle to time, you can see new possibilities and it is very edifying.

JW: What is invention? What is actually happening when artistic invention happens?

BC: My understanding of invention is a reaching in for information that is useful to survival. You might produce a form that is a surprise even to yourself. But it is not just arbitrary newness and novelty. It has to contain information. Anyone can just produce new forms and have ideas; I have realized over the year what invention was. I am naturally psychedelic and can just produce, produce, produce new fun things. But that doesn't necessarily have meaning. So, invention is when you locate something that is useful to your survival.

JW: Your work is a mysterious, fantastical and simultaneously formulaic visual cosmos. It reflects the interpenetration of constructed realities that are expressed through experimental semiotic and syntactical systems. Abstract patterns, geometries, scheme-like drawings and organic forms complete each other. A lot of drawings on the other hand are inhabited by figures: mysterious men are wearing cone hats or are carrying out an ominous mission. A strange man with a covered face appears at various times. A schematic figure, a young woman wearing a shirt with the word "RA" on the front, a person holding a pineapple like a baby. Who are these figures? How are they related? Could they be regarded as access points as mentioned before?

BC: There is one female figure that repeatedly shows up in a classic yoga figure – a squat pose. This hip opening is an archetype for access and is associated with moving forward into the future. It is connected with female sexuality and futurity. There is one work titled *Every Woman has a Stargate in Her Knickers* (2018). Again, this goes back to sort of a witchy wisdom. It is the idea that between your legs is a star gate; sex as a way of seeing into the future. It is not a reproductive framing of female sexuality but a much more technological, clairvoyant understanding of sex, which again has implications. What is sex for if you've passed through your reproductive phase. Why do you still enjoy it if it has no Darwinist function? It has implications that have to do with what we are doing here. You are born to experience how it is to be alive rather than to "pass on your genes". There is a sort of implied critique of Neo-Darwinist theology. The squatting is an archetypal figure of opening yourself, your angle of vision and reception. If you focus your attention on that form it launches you into a different set of realities, which is the sigilistic aspect of making art. You are literally drawing up new realities and new possibilities.

The figures are related in my own cosmos but somehow also related to art history and might be sort of an access point. For example in the *Squatter-She-Logo* (2018) there is a morphological connection that interests me. I recently found out that the artist A.R. Penck was also interested in the similarities between 8-bit technology and pre-historic petroglyphs. He was really into these archaic forms, of early computer graphics and what they had to do with his presence. Bit technology is based on binary numbers and goes back to the original archetype of light or dark. Yes or no, in or out. Everything exists in a potential state of yes or no. Referring back to the *Squatter-She-Logo*: it just literally came to me. I woke up one morning and I had this pure archetype in mind. It is totally unapologetic but also open-hearted. Emotionally or intellectually. It relates back to our present moment: every woman under thirty is squatting her ass off at the moment. Not only because it gives you a good ass but also because it kind of gives you a natural position of being. At the moment for example "Body Odyssey" is a movement or a sort of belief-system for women to be really into strength, fitness and health and what your body is capable of.

The figures in the exhibition show an array of signals that I receive from different channels. They also represent a range of emotions, states of coding and hiding. There is the figure wearing a shirt with the name "RA" on it. The figure is the warrior aspect. She is also sort of an analyst. She is moving through space. She is measuring space and opening up new dimensions of knowing quite actively. The male

figures are masculinity as a mystery instead the popular misandrist notion that they're just a pain in the ass. This perspective interests me. (I feel it strongly and I do love men).

JW: Your work is connected to aspects of perception theory, research, texts of different knowledge systems as well as your own experience, although for viewers these references often remain fragmentary and cryptic. But it also reflects the process of making art itself. Art is a potential strategy for accessing certain knowledge and not a closed circuit. How does art-making become an instrument?

BC: My works are details of my unique space-time vector. They are part of the material I have to work with for my learning. We used the term survey in the context of this exhibition. It means basically the exhibition is reporting from the frontline of a subjective experience. To work materials into an object is a primary modality of research. The ritual of artefact. The creative principle is transductive and the artwork an instrument of calibration of one's own relationship with the universe or with a certain situation. It is also research into the nature of material and creation – to produce artworks. The artefact works as a gnostic modality. Gnosis means deep inner knowing and understanding rather than knowledge as an accumulation of skills, techniques, factoids or formulas. It is an underdeveloped faculty in our current system. It is a striving towards the re-unification with the infinite intelligence, reunion with nature and earth. It basically means knowing the universe through knowing one-self and making a commitment to a lifelong project of research toward the knowing.

JW: The exhibition space determines a certain “reading” of the artworks. Additionally, there is a potential double-bind: the artworks are related to your and the viewers’ subjectivity.

BC: For the spectator what is in the exhibition is called art and is safely contained. You might call him or her the spectator but you might also call him or her the witness. I am just sharing the by-product of my research because I was invited to. Are we having a conversation about access and how the exhibition space can potentially shut down access by virtue of it being framed as art?

JW: ... or open-up access.

BC: speaking personally as someone who occasionally goes to look at art, I have to go three times to gain access. That is triangulation.

JW: It relates back to the notion of temporality.

BC: You will only stay if you feel the pull. If it compels you. It is about the quality of attention. If there is a pattern-coherence, access is possible because the protocol is implied.

Bonnie Camplin (b. 1970, lives and works in London) has presented her work in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including at Camden Arts Centre, London, Michael Benevento, Los Angeles (2016); Tramway, Glasgow (2015); Cabinet, Tate Britain, London (2013); Tate Modern, London (2008), Portikus, Frankfurt a. M. (2007).

Kunsthaus Glarus

Public Program and Art Education

Thursday, June 21, 2018, 6pm

Public guided tour with Wanda Seiler

Wednesday, June 27, 2018, 2pm

Art-Histories for children with Ursula Helg

Thursday, August 16, 2018, 6pm

Public guided tour with Judith Welter

Saturday, August 18, 2018, 5pm

Tour through the exhibition with Bonnie Camplin and Judith Welter

6pm: summer party with barbecue and bar

Sunday, August 19, 2018, 2pm

Art-Histories for families and adults with Ursula Helg