

## Frank Günter Zehnder:

The Voices of the Stones, About the current works of Susanne Krell  
in: Kat. Susanne Krell – Projektionen, Siegburg und Neuwied 2005

When you enter Susanne Krell's quiet studio in Aegidienberg you easily forget you are in the idyllic hometown countryside of the Siebengebirge (Seven Hills). At the same time you sense that this is her retreat where she devotes herself to perpetual creation. The outcrops and excavations around the seven hills, whether old or recent diggings, have provided the building material for the surrounding churches, monasteries, chapels, castles, mansions, farms and manor houses and always offers a picture of some origin, even the origin of the world.

So it is that each stone, however reshaped or prepared, discloses an ancient message or tells stories from within. A stone broken from a rocky cliff or dug from the ground and initially envisaged and appraised by a human hand and eyes is in due course technically fashioned and endowed with a purpose.

It may remain visible but unnoticed for centuries as part of a wall or be used in a honoured artistic sculpture for which you must pay to see. Once in place, stones usually remain where they are next to each other indefinitely.

Stones are hardly ever used for any other purpose than their initial function and often disappear under plaster and paint. After all buildings can't travel.

But who is really interested in stones? Susanne Krell. She has discovered their charm, become fascinated by them and infected others with the same feeling. Each stone is primitive in origin, becoming cultivated when worked on. The artist has developed feelings, understanding and fascination for stones which are by no means dead material. She passes these emotions on to others. This is what fills her studio materially and spiritually and spreads far beyond the home region. Stones from all over the world, all with their different histories and tales linking finder and artist. Outlines or exaggerations. They are all witnesses of something found, discovered, retrieved or taken, saved and occasionally transported over long distances, finally ending up at her studio. This is not obvious for any of the stones. They are registered, numbered and stored. Observed, admired and loved. One hundred and fifty-five stones - moving stones so to speak - have been collected and form what Susanne Krell calls a treasury of remains.

A stone, for example, from the Sergius Church in Cairo, said to be where Mary and Joseph spent the night with Jesus the boychild as they fled to Egypt. Another is from a park in Tokyo which now covers the old battlefield where the Tenno seized power from the Shogun in 1868. Such stones are witnesses and messengers like those from Theresienstadt or New York. When you listen to the artist talking about her

stones you get the impression of a spirit escaping from them, revealing their good or evil stories, in memoriam or as warning, or even magic. Susanne Krell is not concerned about the basic material or geological evidence but with the materialistic cohesion between history and function which develops a spiritual quality. The familiar problems of storing material in the restricted space of the studio hindered further collection necessitating a more practical and, as it turns out, more compact, even picturesque system.

Susanne Krell has developed an artistic process which, in regard to the above mentioned collection of primary relics, results perhaps in secondary relics. Following historical religious belief in pilgrimage, we know that people felt they could absorb the healing or curing magic by applying a piece of cloth or paper to original relics and cribs and taking it away with them. Some Christian vessels used in worship carried the words "attigit" (lat.: has touched) giving these textiles the blessed synonym for mojos, messages or healers. Some of these traditions are apparent in the long and far from finished work sequence of Susanne Krell who has applied her studies to buildings, walls and stone structures all over the world. This carefully prepared concept corresponds well with spontaneous activity. It doesn't remain a concept, but becomes a sensual and intimate experience; the making process may remain the same but each work emerges as its own unique breath in a long sigh of artistry.

The artist applies the technique of rubbing, similar to the original "brass rubbing" developed in English churches in which a sheet of paper is pressed onto the metal plaques set into the tombs and its surface "rubbed" with wax or graphite. Max Ernst introduced this technique, using the term "frottage", into modern art. Susanne Krell places a sheet of paper, sometimes tracing paper, on the selected stone, holds it against the surface and rubs the resulting relief structure with crayon onto the paper. This copying process takes roughly 10 minutes. The locations of these chosen or discovered objects mean that much effort and time is spent on travelling and logistics. The 118 black and white rubbings from Moscow, Trieste, Croatia, Italy, France and Egypt are not only an archive of architectural history in the form of microcosmic extracts but are also comparable to fingerprints or genetic data. Some of the most famous buildings in the world like the pyramid of Cheops near Cairo or, equally important in national respect, Unity Square in Trieste, the Louvre in Paris, St. Peter's in Rome, the cathedral or the Prada district in Milan, Naples cathedral, the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, Cologne cathedral, English cathedrals, and the famous monastery of Cluny are included as well as the house in Bonn where Beethoven was born.

Susanne Krell knows of other exotic or coincidental pictures: she laid hands on the tomb of the Shah of Persia in the ar-Rifai-mosque in Cairo and visited the "House of the Sister of the Mother-in-law of Alyaa", who invited her as a German speaking friend. Of special significance is her rubbing of her parent's home in Betzdorf/Sieg, which, built in the sixties, was eventually sold. The rubbing gives her a natural sized piece of the house to be touched and, therefore, remains close to her— closer than a photo. Vertical buildings are not the only structures she uses. Streets and squares, like the railway station cobblestones in Naples, the Via di Regina in Pompeii or the square in Trieste mentioned earlier.

The sheets of paper are pars pro toto representative pictures of places and draw their own world map. Of course, the Bonn railway station is also included in this sequence, this being the starting point of all "conquering" journeys and the point of return. Naturally, doing these rubbings in public cause surprise and triggers incidents, as in the case of the Moscow Kremlin or Cologne cathedral, when police sceptically inspected the innocent work. This is evidence enough that the work may claim its own uniqueness. Susanne Krell works emphatically and in a determined way at each place to preserve every millimetre of the stone, to reproduce each selected part exactly and to absorb the process with all senses. Each work is a performance which remains in the memory like an infinite bridge between the static original and the mobile rubbing.

While the work is in progress all senses of the sense-pyramid are alert, seeing and hearing, smelling and feeling, the pictures becoming projections in which she transforms the original using her touching sense, artistic technique and emotions. It is a careful procedure, always careful not to provoke attention or hurt feelings, which maintains the balance between a tender touch and pragmatic work accomplishment. To each selected stone or wall she gives a new meaning. The rubbing of a building is a function of the place, the religion, and becomes an ambassador. Each rubbing is something like a special formula. Every project follows an idea, which *also* arranges the world, differentiating and identifying all its parts. All surfaces are significantly different; some have become smoothed to touch or treatment, others have suffered abrasion by the weather or natural decomposition; some are bulky, some are fine, with geometric patterns, or simply reveal stone evolution. No two stones or rubbings are exactly the same, though similarities may develop over the centuries. The project and its progress honour religious buildings and civilizations, their history and presence, art and survival.

The frottages show step by step, from sheet to sheet, absolutely individual patterns and reflect the surfaces of stones which have played a part in politics, economy, religion, transport and culture. It has therefore, become, as developed at St.Peters in Rome, a gathering of the spirits of buildings of the world, irrespective of location and ideology and preserving them two-dimensionally in order to overcome the impossible distances which reality imposes. Cologne cathedral in apparent close environment of the Moscow cathedral, the patriarchal home of Alekseev II and St.Peters within touching distance of the al-Azhar-mosque. Susanne Krell plans to take the rubbing

of this mosque to the synagogue in Berlin. Perhaps this artistic vision of different references will resolve the contradictions. Her sharp work builds up her knowledge of every stone and its story. Number 100 is from Los Arcos in Spanish Camino; locality and directions, life profile, features and images are all carefully collected together and documented in her "findings book".

Susanne Krell goes one step further by colouring the original rubbings in larger sizes. Colour and space, working together in their own specific dominance have been attracting her attention for a long time. In 1997, in the ruins of the monastery in Rommersdorf, she staged a long blue bench, and balancing the luminosity of the colours of the stone-shaded room in combination with yellow, she developed a sensual but powerful atmosphere which allowed lyrical and dynamic energy to escape and be observed. The experience she derived from these cold and warm signs have become a colour scheme of blue and yellow on which she has worked since the year 2000.

She has discovered endless possibilities, some of which are found in the colour layers of the stone pictures. 160 – 180 of these images have been produced so far in which blue and yellow have dominated or have shared in other combinations, proportions or variations. The valour works produce the spirit from several layers of paint which run down from light or shadow. They give each picture a certain character emanating from the artist's memory of a situation and produced by the momentous act of painting.

The individual story of the stone meets the memory of the artist and the passionate stroke of the colour. The principle and freedom of the process are continuously challenged in the act of painting. Two expressions appear under the paintworks which differ in their genesis: there is the pure rubbing and the works which are collages or compositions of stone rubbings; those which exist as a genuine structure, and those which occur as repeated patterns; those which suggest informality, and those which imply ornamental painting.

Susanne Krell has also approached the process of tracing the original frottage and composition autonomously. She develops an almost automatic routine and appears to wander into a meditational flow. The memory of place and the moment of the original application stimulate the working process. The building process within this procedure allows time to pause and re-orientate.

The perception of reality, taking away original structures and dimensions, and the artistic re-composition as well as the gathering of stone profiles, are additionally influenced by her artistic "stoning". Original stone images become templates which are printed on cardboard and folded to the shape of stones which inevitably grow into buildings. Such buildings are the Pont du Gard, the cathedral of Verona, the Bonn Villa Hammerschmidt. You can build the whole world with these folded stones and develop new architectural ideas: a church made of the Cheops pyramid, the Kremlin, Louvre and mosque for example. Imagine the many ingenious perspectives.

The latest artworks such as the wallpiece "Erasmus" in St.Martins church of Linz/Rh (2004), earlier wallpieces in the Bonn Old Rotation (2002); in the Redoute of Bad Godesberg, or the pillar artworks from the cloister yard of the Bonn cathedral present parallel samples, of which, as in example of the farm of La Roche-sur-Grane, the rubbings of the original remain and again pose the question of the relationship between picture and image.

It is not lithomania which drives Susanne Krell, but her passionate search for art which is in effect spurred by spiritual ambition and forensic research, to bring into being the creations on which she is now working. Stones and their rubbings are, it appears, her close and her distant friends. With her intellectual power, her creative sense and care to travel light she tracks them down. To be convinced of a find, with each new trophy offering a new perspective, is pure evidence that her progress will continue without ever coming to a natural halt. So we expect Susanne Krell to live her life as an art nomad – to continue with the extraordinary temptation of talking to the stones and developing this experience in the creation of successful pictures...

Prof. Dr. Frank Günter Zehnder  
Former Director LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn