



HORST JANSSEN'S SUBJECT MATTERS

„I can only draw what I love.“ (Horst Janssen)



Janssen's Frühschoppen, 1965, Bleistift

Horst Janssen is renowned for his portraits as well as his landscapes. His inner worlds are most clearly expressed in his numerous self-portraits, his obsessions in his erotic works. Whether the 'million-stroke artist' forms anamorphic bodies from the finest layers of lines or contours his figures with whimsical arabesques – from an early age, it is the grotesque that has accompanied his artistic thinking. Faces, bodies, erotic works, nature and still lifes – Janssen's gaze always delves beneath the surface of the visible, ruthlessly revealing reality whilst also bearing witness to an exuberant imagination of form. He reveals different truths: objective, external ones, and subjective, internal ones. This is what makes his portraits so masterful, his erotic works so passionate and his observations of nature so inspired.



Portrait and Self-Portrait

For Janssen, the human face is a place of inquiry. In numerous portraits of role models and intellectual giants, close friends and beloved women, he masterfully balances the individual and the archetype. With just a few strokes, he captures the defining characteristics of a personality, whilst also revealing much about his relationship with those he portrays.



Thomas Mann, 1990, Feder und Bleistift



Selbst / 18.12.72 (Hanno's Tod),
Radierung

Hardly any other artist has depicted himself as often as Horst Janssen. Much like his great role model Rembrandt, Janssen's self-portraits bear witness to a delight in mimic and masquerade, but also to an almost pitiless gaze upon his own physical and mental state: He depicts himself as overweight and bloated, expressionless and depressed, but also in a state of agitation and fear, as in the late 'Paranoia' series. In 'Hanno's Tod' (1972), a series of 23 self-portraits unrivalled in their evocative power, his face becomes a landscape of the soul around which the artist literally tours.

Landscape and Still Life

„I do not go out into the landscape; I enter into the landscape, and the images I draw from it (...) I draw them in without intention, sipping them gently with relish – and back in my castle, the landscape drifts through my sleep.“ (Horst Janssen)

The landscape is a place of longing and a mirror of the soul, and has been a central theme in Horst Janssen's work since the 1970s. Inspired by long walks and rambles through nature, in the surroundings of Hamburg and the North German marshes, but also by trips to Ticino, Norway or Paris,



Grüne Landschaft 24.1.92, 1992, Feder, Gouache, Aquarell

Janssen draws from nature and from memory. He translates these into printmaking and uses them as a starting point for transformations that reach into the realm of the fantastical.



Finger-Land Fünf / 23.11.85, 1985, Lithographie



Blütenstreit / 30.10.75, 1975, Radierung

In his still lifes, too, his detailed realism meets an exuberant imagination. Tins and boxes, stones and stamps, buttons and bottle caps cast shadows as if one could pluck them from the page. Janssen observes wilted flowers, rotten fruit, dead animals or worn-out shoes with great empathy, yet also with the detachment of a naturalist. He plays his surreal game with reality, combining trompe l'œil with the objet trouvé.

Eros and Thanatos



In der Schachtel (Phyllis), 1978, Bleistift, Feder, Aquarell

In Janssen's work, Eros cannot be conceived without Thanatos; love cannot exist without death, and beauty cannot exist without the morbid. They define a central tension that Janssen explores throughout his life in ever-changing variations. The female body is an object of desire, but also a mirror of inner experience. At times he spreads it out like a landscape; at others he



Deutsches Krankenhaus
Museum / 15.10.92, 1992,
Radierung



Kabinettstückchen / 24.4.70, 1970, Radierung

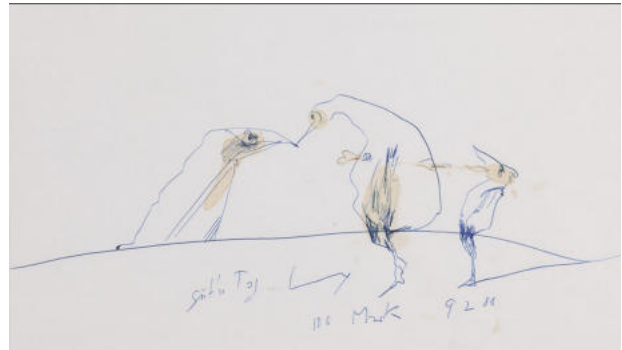
translates it into an almost abstract technical

apparatus, often violently contorted and dissected into individual parts. Frivolous eroticism stands alongside menacing desire; graceful beauty alongside existential turmoil. Janssen's gaze is rarely tender, often uninhibitedly lustful and occasionally as coolly dissecting as that of a surgeon.

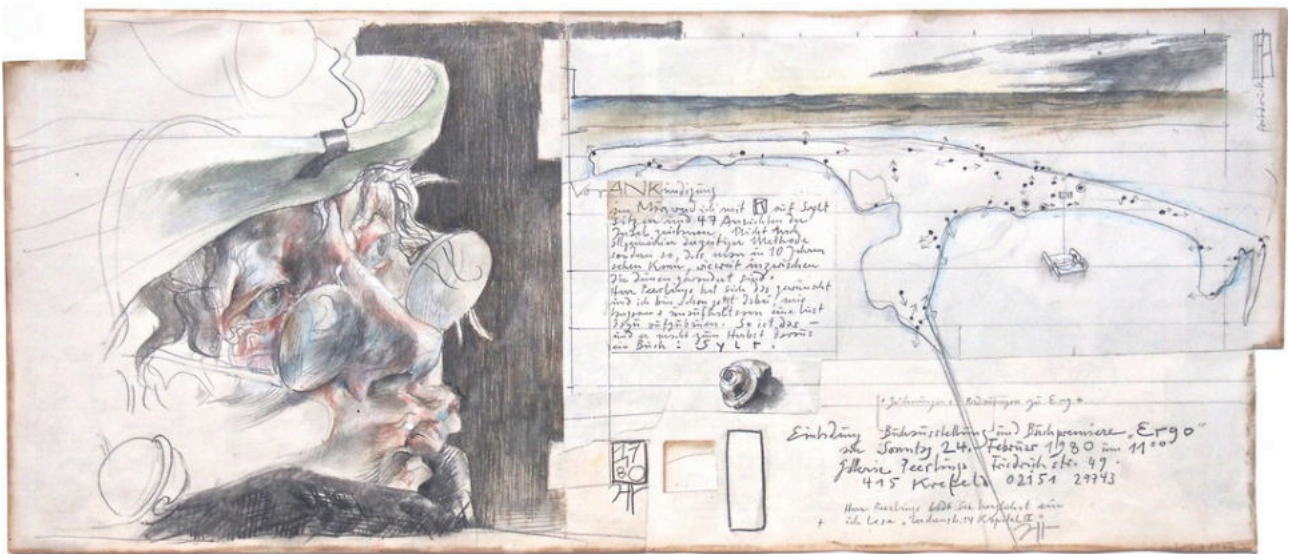


Word and Image

Janssen was as eloquent with images as he was with words. Articulate and keenly observant, he delivered speeches and wrote texts, produced small miniatures and lengthy pamphlets, sketched his contemporaries and dissected the spirit of the time. The forms are fluid: illustrated letters or annotated drawings, posters with long texts such as wall newspapers – here too, Janssen liked to blur the boundaries between genres.



100 Mark / 9.2.88, 1988, Kugelschreiber, Kaffeefleck



Sylt / Einladung zur Buchausstellung und Premiere „Ergo“, 1980, Bunt- und Bleistift

Janssen did not merely wish to create ‘high’ art, but to reach people directly. He was inspired by an educational impulse. Throughout his life, the virtuoso graphic designer created more than 150 posters and numerous postcards. They cover the entire spectrum of techniques, stylistic levels and motifs, and to this day adorn countless living spaces and offices.

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