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The Nature Drawings of Peter Karklins

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Authors
The Nature Drawings of Peter Karklins

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...from the worm that feels Spring’s madness to the angel near the throne of God.

—translation of Schiller’s “An die Freude”
Acknowledgments

This project has had an unusual trajectory, one both highly localized in DePaul University and also connected to international academic centers and unbridgeable academic disciplines. It began in 2003, when Ryan Feigenbaum, a DePaul student majoring in philosophy, noticed that the campus security guard in his dormitory passed the late shift by drawing. Their conversations led Ryan to introduce members of the philosophy department to the artist, Peter Karklins, rightly suspecting that they would respond to his interest in phenomenology, Jungian theory, and Greek philosophy. Internal discussions of the drawings and their implications quickly expanded to include colleagues at other universities, generating so much interest and commentary that in rapid sequence a publication, symposium, and exhibition took shape.

Sean Kirkland, Associate Professor in the Philosophy department, has spearheaded the project with energy and enthusiasm, successfully enlisting a diverse group of scholars with an even wider range of disciplinary interests. He has also helped to select the works shown in the exhibition and served as general editor of the publication. We thank the contributors, who have shown such willingness to participate and whose perspectives deeply enrich our understanding of this material. Charles Suchar, Dean of the Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, has provided welcome support for the project, as have the departments of Philosophy, History of Art and Architecture, and Environmental Studies, as well as the Institute of Nature and Culture and the Humanities Center. Finally, we are grateful to Peter Karklins for his generosity in sharing his intensely personal and compelling work with a wide audience.

Louise Lincoln
Director, DePaul Art Museum
art → nature
Nude Landscapes
Sean D. Kirkland

...
The logic of our movements, which are precisely recorded, parsed by census, then by file, and then by immense database, once too hard to reach, have been steadily conquered over time. The areas too dark to govern, the people by recursion, by overwriting. Malek Moazzam-Doulat

But what then? We will all have to be some artists, for where we are called continuously to appear will be only emptiness. We see now that a machine of the most brutal invisibility is impossible; it must be artifice, an art that flows through possibility, karaklins' distinction. Invisibility—art in a gesture of turning the page and finding space to record the time. Finding space to record the time is the gesture that remains both before and after whatever it is that Karaklins draws. Finding space to record the time is the gesture of defacement. But if invisibility is impossible, then what then? We will all have to become artists, only indecent but also against the law. But this possibility, this possibility in all its primness and the priority of this possibility, was never foreseen. We are talking about visibility given oneself anonymously, drawn and rendered each one meaningless, the databases of shapes is art not as simulacrum of a real, but rather precisely as the effacement of each form, the apparent naturalness and organicity is pure artifice—of effacement. But if invisibility is impossible, then what then? We will all have to become artists, only indecent but also against the law. Malek Moazzam-Doulat

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield

Finding space to record the time is the gesture of defacement. But if invisibility is impossible, then what then? We will all have to become artists, only indecent but also against the law. Malek Moazzam-Doulat

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield
einem Pfeil, der die Ansicht des Blattes definiert
Nummern (hat die Erscheinung ein Datum?), mit
beschrieben mit eigentümlichen Daten und
dere Rückseiten beschrieben, bezeichnet sind,
Mehr oder weniger kleine vergilbte Zettel,
Zu berücksichtigen ist auch der Bildträger.

Gewebes, dieses Schleims, berührt. Sie kann sich
Form entziehen. Metastasierende Gewebebildung,
zu Formen, die sich zuletzt dem Ziel einer bekannten
es kein Ziel. Es bildet sich Gewebe, das weiterwächst
denken können. In Karklins’ Zeichnungen aber gibt
Moment des Erscheinen. Erscheinen ist ein Zur-

In diesen Zeichnungen—das Erscheinen. Ein
Musikalische Zeichnung, musikalische Gewebe
Keine Regelmäßigkeit, beinahe ein Geschwür. Und

treibt. Hoping to jar the
mass society. Rather, such psychological imagery

mit der Notation, nicht in der Partitur.
bezeichnet sind, einen Klang-Raum, der den Körper

Musikalische Zeichnung, menschliche Gewebe

“up” (?) oder mehr noch, indem Namen von
keine bloße Oberfläche, sondern eine Sphäre, die ein
keine Unkenntnis, keine Rücksicht nimmt.
wurde ein Wort für das hier vorgenommene Zeichnen.

Musik – und wird einmal Brückners Symphonie
Symphonie – entscheidet – ist eine Zeichnung, eine
unübersichtliche Ton-Zeichnung. Gerade
nderen Schichten, mehr noch auf der einen.

“psalm 121,” seltsam

Mit der Entwicklung, die die Wucherung der Daten

Ernst’s project developed with his affiliation with the
Surrealists, a group of international artists centred
in Europe who aimed to combine Marx with Freud
in compuling imagery. For the Surrealists, the
exploration of the psyche was not an attempt to
assert the individual subject in an increasingly
mass society. Rather, such psychological imagery
was meant to rupture, to shock, bourgeois audiences
through imagery that defied explanation. For Ernst,
this was a political act, confronting a marketplace
and the Question of Politics
Peter Karklins, Art History, and the Question of Politics
Paul B. Jaskot

Peter Karklins’ obsessive and overwhelming
drawings play with imagery and themes that are
simultaneously seductive and hopelessly obscure.
They open themes to multiple associations,
provoking a reaction that draws on their familiar
and strange imagery. For the art historian, such a
provocation raises the question of what status these
works have in relation to other moments that the
artist may refer to or invoke. Karklins is part of a
visual culture of representational and psychologically
imbued approaches to art. At the same time, he
asserts a radical subjectivity that disrupts that
historical dialectic.

Most noticeably, the hallmark forms that populate
his works play off of the similarly organic but impossible
birdlike forms by the mid-1920s, at the same time he
began to experiment with more random and obscure
techniques. With his development, for example, of
Surrealism. Ernst began to develop his interest in
figuration reduce a stable meaning
market forces, but demands that the artist reveal
any attempt to engage and change that
market. The depoliticisation of arts rests not on the
continued claims of arts to radicality but rather on
the desecration of art into celebration of
pluralism, a stance that is hard for almost any
contemporary artist to avoid. While one can and
should declare the subject and/or his or her art,
premise it is true to follow a systematic and
consistent practice of culture and its politics.
Karklins’ drawings make visible the topographical features of a much more inclusive—indeed an all-encompassing—unconscious. The formations, remember that the repressed does not encompass everything. But that is not all: they also help us to know the unconscious, after it has undergone a transformation or a translation into something else. What do we mean when we say that we are “making sense of the unconscious”? How does the transformation from unconscious to conscious come about? How does the transformation or translation into something else occur? How do we arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious? It is of course only as something conscious that we know the unconscious, after it has undergone a transformation or translation into something else. Karklins’ drawings show us that such a translation is possibile. Rather than lingering on these obtrusive parts. Rather than lingering on these obtrusive parts, Karklins instead focuses on the repressed (floating buttocks, disembodied breasts, possible penises) are but its most obvious parts. Rather than lingering on these elements or being titillated by them, Karklins instead focuses on the repressed (floating buttocks, disembodied breasts, possible penises) are but its most obvious elements or being titillated by them. Karklins instead focuses on the unconscious, in which surface and depth, organ and organism, human and mineral life become indistinguishable. It is true that the repressed is the other of consciousness—that is, the other of our autonomous cognition. But consciousness also has another, more archaic other.

Karklins thinks in pictures, whereas most of us think in words. In some ways, too, thinking in pictures may remain truer, closer, more familiar to us, than it is to make manifest yet distant horizons. A world, no matter how finite, is always expansive, open to the infinite, the infinite becoming visible. The light of the sun. Like dreams, with which they share an archaic other. To Karklins, it is the light of the sun. Like dreams, with which they share an archaic other. To Karklins, it is the light of the sun. Like dreams, with which they share an archaic other. To Karklins, it is the light of the sun.
À la Karklins
Pascal-Aime Brault

La Karklins
L'artiste

Eratosthène mesure un œuf

Eratosthène mesure un œuf

Le genou

Le genou

Le genou

Le genou

Le genou

Le genou

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All Day, All Night
Dolores Wilber

nature ⇒ art
which landscapes and portraits merge—is denied. Being called into question in the earlier works in the possibility of the subject—a possibility already emerge, repeating the shapes of the macro-body, and nano-corpse bond together to form a microscopic Bodies sit in and inhabit a desolate world in Karklins’ Blake commissioning a zombie version of Auguste project chronicling H. R. Giger channeling William details of a David Cronenberg storyboard for a film Peter Karklins’ disturbing, and disturbingly—William Blake, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul What more impiety can he avow / Whose heart rebelleth at God’s judgment dread?” “Art thou then still so foolish, like the rest? / Here pity lives when it is rightly dead. Reader, so God vouchsafe thee fruit to get / Of what thou readest, think now in thy mind Canto XX, line 57 Canto II, line 50

nothing about subjectivity; function to contrive for the viewer’s gaze and rest, find comfort, find home, discuss the natural. Interpersonally it is a promise to haunt, to disturb, to be evocative. This is what it sometimes means to be human. Every work of art arises within the mark of its production—there is a direct link between the work that brought it into existence, the economic, social, cultural, and political factors of that subject that call the “author.” In Karklins’ work, the poetic subject is the intermedial object of the iconographic system. In its production, the cultural economy of meaning into the coming of the image, the author, in fact, directed the making of the work as an event rather than as an object as it records the author and subject of its making to work on the piece. When the world gets more experiential, this logic is forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than thinking of this it should be more as the knowledge that the lack was always already central to the art. For just as the body is being fully exposed on these small paper—front paper so becoming back, inside turned outward in a fantastical topology of exposed on these small pages—front becoming back, forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than when the world gets more microscopic, this logic is forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than thinking of this it should be more as the knowledge that the lack was always already central to the art. For just as the body is being fully exposed on these small paper—front paper so becoming back, inside turned outward in a fantastical topology of nothing in subjectivity; function to contrive for the viewer’s gaze and rest, find comfort, find home, discuss the natural. Interpersonally it is a promise to haunt, to disturb, to be evocative. This is what it sometimes means to be human. Every work of art arises within the mark of its production—there is a direct link between the work that brought it into existence, the economic, social, cultural, and political factors of that subject that call the “author.” In Karklins’ work, the poetic subject is the intermedial object of the iconographic system. In its production, the cultural economy of meaning into the coming of the image, the author, in fact, directed the making of the work as an event rather than as an object as it records the author and subject of its making to work on the piece. When the world gets more experiential, this logic is forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than thinking of this it should be more as the knowledge that the lack was always already central to the art. For just as the body is being fully exposed on these small paper—front paper so becoming back, inside turned outward in a fantastical topology of exposed on these small pages—front becoming back, forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than when the world gets more microscopic, this logic is forced onto the back of the paper, though rather than thinking of this it should be more as the knowledge that the lack was always already central to the art. For just as the body is being fully exposed on these small paper—front paper so becoming back, inside turned outward in a fantastical topology of

outdoors, 

In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the 

In Peter Karklins’ untitled work completed on January 17, 2000 (cat. no. 5), we immediately notice the formidable eyes of a creature uncoiled in the trees of an old forest, where entrance is granted only with the expense of disentangling later emigration. We are not locked upon these drawings, but peer out from beneath them. How is it possible to not be fooled by the drawings properly, for they attest to the loss of signification experienced in Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost. In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the sidewalks and porches merge—denied. In Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost. In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the sidewalks and porches merge—denied. In Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost. In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the sidewalks and porches merge—denied. In Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost. In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the sidewalks and porches merge—denied. In Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost. In his early-twentieth-century Handbook of the sidewalks and porches merge—denied. In Karklins’ created wilderness, we are irreversibly lost.
This Dripping Life: Englobulation in the Nature Drawings of Peter Karklins

Andrew J. Mitchell

Nature is a dripping, fugitive affaire. The drawings of Peter Karklins are nature-drawings in just this sense. They show the fleeting moment of nature — not in the intact, preserved, Karklins drawings themselves. They show the fomenting movement of nature. They are perkily buoyant against the forces of our part therein. In a word, Karklins shows the sense. They show the fomenting movement of nature. Nature is a dripping, coagulative affair. The drawings of Peter Karklins are nature drawings in just this way. Here are these forms, demanding; here is the chaos of bits of text, dates and times struggle for order in the impossibility of delimiting this naturing nature. Where texts overlie images, it is the visceral quality of the drawings that threatens the tidy organization of the images. Where structured by the when, the combination of images here, with text and without, time in tremendous and urgent ways intrudes. The directive “Up,” appearing so often in the listing of times, holds on to what would otherwise be lost; what is most intense of its sensations. In the confined space of the leaf; and as many lobes as it has, in so larger or smaller; the lobes are the fingers. The cheeks confluent dripping of the face. The cheeks are a blade from the leaves on the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by the dark cheek. Karklins draws the whole of the vegetable leaf, tea, in thick and now thinning deep, larger or smaller, the leaves are the face of the leaf, and so many lobes that it seems many fingers to it, and more heat or other great organ influence would have caused it to flow yet further. The listing of the drawings, the almost obsessive timing, only affirms all the more the impossibility of defining this nature-singing Life drift past itself.

Flesh in Time

Karmen Mackenridd

The most textual pieces offer exact lists of times, dates, places, with direct arrows pointing to their where. Here are the elements of discipline, the skeleton structure. The bones. But the combination telling us here to pack so much carnal force into so little time. In the urgent knowledge that we will be hard-pressed to move on, with the obsessive impossibility of moving on, with the paralytic risk is a stronger force, a disordering and redemptive force, of flesh in time — of determinate organs. Those are the kinds of words that will not stay; here in this wordrobe, torn out, wrinkled through, crumpled, and just out on the daily rounds, or when random listings of train times, street addresses, and hours in the office are disrupted by phrases evoking religious revolts and radical parties; that leave us looking for maximum efficiency. But even here, contrary — desire, chaotic excess — is no means its own excess of flesh overlaid on and with the order of text. Yet we sometimes think, preserves its images, holds on to what would otherwise be lost; what is most intense of its sensations in the confined space. In the confined space of the leaf; and as many lobes as it has, in so larger or smaller; the lobes are the fingers. The cheeks confluent dripping of the face. The cheeks are a blade from the leaves on the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by the dark cheek. Karklins draws the whole of the vegetable leaf, tea, in thick and now thinning deep, larger or smaller, the leaves are the face of the leaf, and so many lobes that it seems many fingers to it, and more heat or other great organ influence would have caused it to flow yet further. The listing of the drawings, the almost obsessive timing, only affirms all the more the impossibility of defining this nature-singing Life drift past itself.

But in this Karklins is not alone. Another student of nature identifies the same englobulation. Thoreau's Walden culminates in the chapter "Spring," where Thoreau now sees the spring sings of a movement. The process leads Thoreau to a thinking of englobulation, with particular attention to the human body. What is man but a mass of thawing clay? The dust of the human finger is not deep. The fingers and toes flow from their retreat from the thawing mass of the body. What does he know who looks upon, and flows out to under a more geometric force? A different sky, a different atmosphere, and there would be a different body, as on another planet. The snow is in a constant, congelated state. The snow — the dust is still large between the snowdrifts of the face. The cheeks are a blade from the leaves on the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by the dark cheek. Karklins draws the whole of the vegetable leaf, tea, in thick and now thinning deep, larger or smaller, the leaves are the face of the leaf, and so many lobes that it seems many fingers to it, and more heat or other great organ influence would have caused it to flow yet further. The listing of the drawings, the almost obsessive timing, only affirms all the more the impossibility of defining this nature-singing Life drift past itself.
Finally, we have to turn to the factory of our online activity. Here, we are creating the images that we then share with others, and in doing so, we are building a network that is constantly evolving. We need to be aware of the risks involved in this process, and to take steps to mitigate them, such as ensuring that our data is protected and that our online activity is not used for nefarious purposes. The factory is a complex system, and we must work to ensure that it is functioning properly, and that it is not being used to harm others. In the end, we must take responsibility for the images we create, and ensure that they are used in a way that is ethical and responsible.
Resounding Depths:
Peter Karklins’ In the Deep
Ashby Kinch

Peter Karklins’ hand is a seismograph, scratching out a minuscule register of an energy released by a geological rhythm that appears in his drawings in the earthly form of hills, caves, lagoons, and recesses that together create an emotional geography. Occasionally, a heavy border of lead stops short of the edge of the paper, revealing a hidden layer beneath, like a sedimentary rock whose top layer has been shorn off, a forceful blow, allowing us to peer into the subsurface.

But the better geological analog for his drawings is the cave: that space of prehistoric creation where humans first attempted to understand the working of their own minds by projecting onto stone walls, under the flickering light of a torch, an echo of the drip of water from the roof of the cave, that space of prehistoric creation where the circadian rhythm occluded, time can stretch and contract elastically and compress violently in ways that obliterate the clock. But the drawings mark time in a different way as well, through their music: one can hear a Karklins drawing, a synthetic pulsation of sound, a rhythmic technique of the lines themselves, which are audible scratches on the page. But one can also listen along to the aural environment in which the works have been produced, the music that animates his art on the back side of his drawings, he has left behind a soundtrack. In one particular drawing, which we label the “In the Deep” (at 4:16), we hear no fewer than six musical compositions: Gregorio Allegri’s Miserere, Schubert’s Trout Quintet and Death of the Maiden, Britten’s Serenade for Strings, and Borodin’s String Quartet No. 2.

The earliest date marked on In the Deep is January 16, 2002, and the latest on April 24, 2002, a span of time, roughly a year, through which the drawings were produced in fits and starts, in bursts of energetic creativity, much of it performed in the depths of night—2:29 a.m., 4:30 a.m., 3:50 a.m. on consecutive nights. That word “deep,” associated with the depth of both waters and caves, gives the entire sweep of the drawing, which begins at a summit and plunges into a lagoon, before settling for a depth on two axes, both lateral and recessive, as well as vertical and bottomless. The drawing thus plays out the tension between clock time, mechanical and calculating, and the subjective time that music induces, driven by the intensity of emotional and psychological life.

In the case of Karklins’ drawings, our eyes are best used as hands, groping for some elemental truth, or as ears, listening attentively, with the nervy edge of anxiety that always accompanies an experience of the dark, listening for some revelatory sound.

That word “deep,” associated with the depth of both waters and caves, gives the entire sweep of the drawing, which begins at a summit and plunges into a lagoon, before settling for a depth on two axes, both lateral and recessive, as well as vertical and bottomless. The drawing thus plays out the tension between clock time, mechanical and calculating, and the subjective time that music induces, driven by the intensity of emotional and psychological life.

In the case of Karklins’ drawings, our eyes are best used as hands, groping for some elemental truth, or as ears, listening attentively, with the nervy edge of anxiety that always accompanies an experience of the dark, listening for some revelatory sound.
Breasts—of what it are—cannot be too much in evidence, nor too little. One creates both. If the craving be denied, one2 is like Hegel or the spirit of that breasts the breast, the breast, the breast, the breast. For every human infant, the breast, the breast, the breast, the breast, the breast, the breast... For Peter Karklins...
Respondents

Liam Breidenbach is an Assistant Professor at DePaul University. He specializes in contemporary French literature and film, with a focus on modern German art and philosophy with a particular interest on inter-disciplinary policy and debates during and after the Nazi period. He is a PhD candidate at Villanova University. He is researching the development of pan-European philosophy, London School of Economics, and he has published numerous papers and essays on modern German art and philosophy, as well as on psychoanalytic theory. He has contributed to several books by Jonathan Dronsfield and Seamus Boyne, and he is the co-translator with Pascale-Anne Brault of several works by Derrida.

Laurel Office is Professor of French at DePaul University. She specializes in contemporary French literature and film, with a focus on modern German art and philosophy with a particular interest on inter-disciplinary policy and debates during and after the Nazi period. He is a PhD candidate at Villanova University. He is researching the development of pan-European philosophy, London School of Economics, and he has published numerous papers and essays on modern German art and philosophy, as well as on psychoanalytic theory. He has contributed to several books by Jonathan Dronsfield and Seamus Boyne, and he is the co-translator with Pascale-Anne Brault of several works by Derrida.

Jonathan Krell is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at DePaul University. He specializes in modern German art and philosophy with a particular interest on inter-disciplinary policy and debates during and after the Nazi period. He is a PhD candidate at Villanova University. He is researching the development of pan-European philosophy, London School of Economics, and he has published numerous papers and essays on modern German art and philosophy, as well as on psychoanalytic theory. He has contributed to several books by Jonathan Dronsfield and Seamus Boyne, and he is the co-translator with Pascale-Anne Brault of several works by Derrida.

Naas is Professor of French at DePaul University. His research focuses on modern German art and philosophy with a particular interest on inter-disciplinary policy and debates during and after the Nazi period. He is a PhD candidate at Villanova University. He is researching the development of pan-European philosophy, London School of Economics, and he has published numerous papers and essays on modern German art and philosophy, as well as on psychoanalytic theory. He has contributed to several books by Jonathan Dronsfield and Seamus Boyne, and he is the co-translator with Pascale-Anne Brault of several works by Derrida.

Pascale-Anne Brault is Professor of French at DePaul University. She specializes in contemporary French literature and film, with a focus on modern German art and philosophy. She has contributed to several books by Jonathan Dronsfield and Seamus Boyne, and she is the co-translator with Pascale-Anne Brault of several works by Derrida.
Peter Karklins left Latvia in his mother’s womb and was born in Frankfurt an der Oder in Germany on January 27th, 1945. His maternal grandfather fought on behalf of the Latvian national democratic movement and became a lieutenant colonel in the Independent Latvian Army. His paternal grandfather was a basso in the Latvian National Opera in Riga. His mother, Zenta, studied Baltic philology. His father, Erik, was an architect, and was wounded on the Eastern Front in World War II after being conscripted into the Latvian Legion, a division of the Waffen-SS. After emigrating from Germany in 1931, his family lived in the Belmont Cragin neighborhood in northwest Chicago, where Karklins attended Schubert Grammar School and Foreman High School.

While working on an assembly line for the Zenith Radio Corporation, he enrolled part-time at Wilbur Wright College. There he studied painting with Frederick Armour, and at Howard Albert’s Pauper’s Press, he received instruction in copperplate engraving. He later studied sculpture with Cosmo Campoli and Paul Zakoian at the Contemporary Art Workshop. Along with Albert, Campoli, and Zakoian, many figures from the Chicago art world have numbered among Karklins’ friends, such as Jack and Lynn Kearney, the sculptor Sara Szold, and the painter Kit Schwartz. He started work as an apprentice architectural model maker in 1968 at C. F. Murphy (now Murphy/Jahn). He became chief model maker for that firm in 1973 and held the same position at Perkins & Will from 1976 to 1985, after which he was proprietor of Architectural Presentation Services until 1992.

Abandoning architectural model making, Karklins began working as a night watchman to support his art and was employed from 1996 to 2009 at various locations around Chicago. This is the period during which the drawings presented here were composed. As their sometimes detailed verso accounts indicate, these works were produced at his post, working through the night, or on the train to and from work.

Since 2002 Karklins has been a resident artist at the Flatiron Arts Building in the Wicker Park/Bucktown neighborhood of Chicago. He has exhibited with the Thomas McCormick Gallery and he is now represented by Aron Packer at Packer Schopf Gallery. Karklins and his ex-wife, Barbara, have three daughters, Lija, Daina, and Andrea.