

# PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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## Living in Paradise

### On the Meditative Black Watercolors of Joachim Bandau

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When all doors open, when all abysses of fear have been overcome and every subjective desire has been switched off, when the view gets clear like a mountain lake in spring, when the excited play of thoughts is interrupted and the hand finds rest, there comes to life a state of being out of which Joachim Bandau, born 1936, creates his meditative watercolors. For more than twenty years now the sculptor has been practicing this painting rite, demanding the highest degree of concentration, self-possession, discipline, trust and patience. The work, graphic-painterly, is created by a contemporary who thinks three-dimensionally, whose work mirrors inner spaces, which have recently become increasingly more complex, layered in and about one another. Bandau understands how to employ his media with ever greater sovereignty, unveiling picture-spaces of nearly musical transparency while retaining a great sensual vision.

Even as Miles Davis' free improvisations trumpet wildly through his studio while Bandau works, the inner force of his "Black Watercolors" remains unbroken. Immersed in the painting process, he turns it around: lines emerge not as borders of surface-space but as a result of application of areas of color. While drying, lines form, made up of clotted paint-pigment, sharp and clear at the color's edges, applied by a broad Japanese brush. The lines are so fine the viewer thinks they were made by a pencil. These lines have been created with no further device than the meeting of wet and dry paint-surfaces while applying a brush not too softly nor too hard. Where surface touches surface, where paint layers overlap, building on top of one another, increasing in density to form rhombic shapes, picture-spaces of unquestionable architectural quality are unveiled: corridors, cells, walls open entirely new fields of association.

Bandau has increasingly been keen to avoid routine. Rest periods set between painting phases are just as important to him as the action itself. He works till exhaustion, on light and dark rows each individually, in a single extended session. Such phases occur in studios in Stäfa, on Lake Zurich, and at Aachen, lasting from two or three weeks up to several months. He plans his subject only vaguely. He decides whether he should explore layers, couplings, diagonals, rows, mirrorings. Once the individual sheet has been put on a neutral ground, it paints itself, so to speak, step by step. What was wished for beforehand is not always what gets created. The paradisiacal state of being – highest concentration – bears fruit with surprises emerging out the work process. During this time, the artist has to remain hyper-aware of the dynamics of what occurs. Mistakes and corrections are hardly possible here. He works in a circuitous way while bending over and moving about the painting table, simultaneously working from all sides, while the paper curls and buckles under wet paint layers, creating "lakes" and "mountains." By moving it to and fro, dabbing up the superfluous amounts of pigment, he directs paint-flow toward the edges, where those hard dry lines are formed that divide up the pictorial space.

Each field gains its own autonomy while being worked on individually and pressed to dry. The long and complicated process – consisting of painting, drying, painting, drying – nearly reminds one of extra-sensitive varnishing work. Among the challenges of the process is the fact that the artist reacts creatively even to varied conditions of the paper. It might be the surface of the paper contains tinges of color or miniscule glue-segments, differentiating among themselves in how they take layered applications of paint-pigment, which can lead to spots and streaks, which the artist skillfully disguises.

The meditative work of the sculptor-as-painter demands great finesse and technical agility. Recently, Bandau's painted sheets have gained much in virtuosity. They remind one of landscapes, glass objects and spatial constellations, reminiscent of Dan Graham's pavilions and lamp-objects by Jorge Pardo.

The initial series of watercolors was created in the summer of 2004. The series developed in parallels, across four to five sheets of paper. Areas of color soar diagonally over the individual sheets' borders. Or blocks have been formed resembling dark windows at whose edges the dying rays of daylight seem to have fallen, spread out in different values of gray. This aspect of the work-as-process gets its emphasis by being drawn in a definite direction over the various sheets of paper.

Each of these works is individually framed. The works may be turned about, put in a different order, to create surprising tensions between their elements. Progressive stages in the new series become visible, quite reminiscent of Duchamp's *Bride Descending the Staircase* and the repertoire of the Italian and Russian futurists in the early twentieth century, without directly quoting them. Despite his distant proximity to modern art history, Bandau stands by himself. As a sculptor he recreates shadows, objects, walls, rooms, floors, windows, gray on gray, with transparency and peace, as though from the distance of a remote state of consciousness. Here lies what is most mysterious, at the same time most convincing, about the new watercolors: their transparency, openness.

**On Occasion of the exhibition of Joachim Bandau at PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY, 2004**