

## **Peter Huse, Berlin, 2000**

Winfried Wolk: Graphic cycles, article in "Grafische Kunst", issue 54 (the first in 2000).

Winfried Wolk's work as an artist is decisively shaped by various influences. He belongs to a generation in our country, born in 1941 amid the inferno of World War II, which all too early in their lives had to cope with the horror of war and its direct repercussions on interpersonal relationships.

At Leipzig High School for Graphics and the Art of the Book, he studied painting and graphic art under Professors Werner Tübke, Bernhard Heisig and Wolfgang Mattheuer between 1963 and 1969. With the knowledge thus acquired and the artistic technique he had learnt, together constituting his own artistry, he received the cherished opportunity to try out and experience his own his dual gift for drawing and verbal expression. Since 1971 Winfried Wolk has lived and worked in Gädebehn, not far from Schwerin. He mentioned the impulses behind his work as an artist in the ensuing years in his speech after receiving the DAG (German Employees' Union) Art Prize in 1993: "For as long as I have been able to think, my reality has resided in a closed country. It was thus only to a limited extent possible to arrive at a worldview. Dreams and hopes survived, nevertheless, providing space for often cramped realities, making them wider, and giving them dimensions that far exceeded the opportunities of the reality that could be experienced elsewhere. Longings that are hard to satisfy cloud one's view of reality. My pictures remain positioned in this field of tension between reality to be experienced and the deficits felt. That is the field of tension on which art of high quality develops. "

Winfried Wolk's ideas for pictures and topics have been and are very strongly influenced by his marked affinity for literature. Literary models by authors not attacked in the GDR provided him with materials in which he could similarly unassailably "package" his messages. Etchings based on Hesse, Kunert, Bobrowski, Heine, Becher, Rilke, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Ernesto Cardenal and Jevgeni Schwarz resulted.

From 1974, he assembled theme groups of relevance to him in graphic cycles. In that year, he made five coloured silk-screen prints on the theme "Kommt, seht das Blut in den Strassen" ("Come, see the blood in the streets"). In 1976 he addressed a part of German history with his cycle "Der gewöhnliche Faschismus" ("Everyday fascism"), also consisting of five silk-screen prints. With "Menschheitsträume" ("Mankind's dreams"), (three coloured silk-screen prints, 1978) he completed his exploration of silk-screen technique for the time being and turned to intaglio prints.

Between 1976 and 1981, Winfried Wolk created 14 coloured etchings on the theme of "German poems". Influenced by Jevgeni Schwarz's play "Der Drache" (The Dragon), in 1980/1981 he made four aquatint etchings "Der Drache, Schwarze Blätter" ("The Dragon: Black prints") in his first treatment of the material of the play. In 1983 he once again explored the themes raised in the cycle with five coloured silk-screen prints. With "The Ball on the Titanic", a cycle of three aquatinta etchings, in the same year he made the most directly critical treatment of the social model practiced in the GDR. In these visionary prints, Winfried Wolk anticipated the collapse of the state that ensued six years later.

Wolk's concern about the misuse of power, with the suppression of individuals and the people and the infringement of the laws of humanity, culminated during the artistically for him extraordinary year 1983 with the cycle "Latin American Psalms". Winfried Wolk addressed the work of Ernesto Cardenal with twelve very moving aquatinta etchings.

In 1989-90 Winfried Wolk made aquatinta dry-point etchings on the theme "Spielkiste" ("Box of Toys") and then in 1993 shone with 15 chalk drawings centred on "Der Weg nach Golgotha" ("The way to Golgotha"). In these prints, he castigated ways of behaviour and thus analyzed the German-German state of mind shortly after the fall of the Wall. In 1998, he hatched a surprise with the cycle "Erwachen" ("Awakening"- seven coloured etchings). Winfried Wolk took as the theme for this work the relationship between the individual and society. The necessarily resulting - or deliberately provoked - contrasts constitute his general theme here.

Proving sensitive to the extent of being wounded, he analyses the middle of his life, affected by epochal changes and revaluations, along with the (for him) novel economic and social relationships that people embark on (and need to form) both among and with each other. In 1993, he summed this up after receiving the art prize already mentioned "So the deficits remain, a perfect human society remains far off, unattainable because the impulses behind the new (Federal German – Ed.) societies lie so close to the former ones."

Wolk does not strive for harmony in or with his works. The scope for action he creates in the pictures he devises are deliberately destroyed by him, with breaches being made, in analogy with life. With ironic distance, and at once moved and hurt by his helplessness, he analyzes a society that proclaims itself rational and acts irrationally, being solely profit-orientated. Self-imposed limits here do not prevent him from becoming an interventionist, a visionary Utopian or a moralist. The brilliant draftsman and articulate thinker deliberately uses the weapons of satirical exaggeration and ascent into the grotesque. Both talents enable him to use the artist's pencil and the word as a foil in the battle against human vices.

Winfried Wolk prints his etchings himself, and can therefore optimally realize the idea behind the work plus its implementation. Painting, drawing, printing and computer graphics are on a completely equal footing when practiced by him, this being a principle that has so far proved fertile for his oeuvre. His sketches and works on paper are dominated by linear weight and an impulsive cultivation of strokes. Against any possibly superficial brilliance of gesture is ranged his general attitude. Any decoding that one may believe oneself to be discovering will emerge from a foreground transformation.

Any ambiguity rendering the work intellectual remains banished. Refinement is only tolerated where it is a sequel to intuition. The fantastic ambivalence revealed by part of his work is invariably the legitimate offspring of untrammelled delight in drawing, vehemently felt at the time yet rich in little surprises. Symbols and metaphors here speak for feelings and associations. The banal becomes monstrous, and anything bombastic/posing rigidifies in banality. Something lasting is created! In the creative process, Wolk feels himself to be working in the same spirit as such colleagues as Honoré Daumier und Max Ernst. He restlessly and joyfully generates a world of pictures and language. Experiment is his constant companion. He thus over-paints landscape photographs using digital means and creates new worlds of painting that aesthetically are stupendously intriguing in their surrealism. As in these new examples, for all the differences in Wolk's subjects, a clearly unavoidable warning is present. His art provokes and polarizes. Unease arises in those who see themselves caught in the lies that constitute their lives. Yet at all events, his art challenges us above all to a dialogue. It moves and impresses. It is socially relevant in that it calls people to self-contemplation.