

Creation

Over the last few years, the account of the Creation in the book of Genesis has absorbed the artist Franz Bucher (born in 1940 in Sarnen, living and working in Horw) in a most intensive way. At the outset of the debate, Bucher recapitulated the all-embracing topic of evolution in an unusually long but at the same time adequately narrow wide-format, in such a way that the observer of the flow of events feels himself to be utterly caught up by them. These pictures, in their epic amplitude and in the tranquil sequence of the scenes, present the myth of creation, impressively before our eyes. The single events interlock into a whole, merge with each other and wish to be “read” step by step in proper order from left to right. Franz Bucher, however, is an artist who as far as content is concerned, goes on to explore a relevant and artistically demanding problem, resulting often in broad batches and in many variations, and he tries out the various media of painting, drawing and prints in order to arrive at differing statements and effects.

Given that the large pictures were the source of a multiplicity of smaller paintings which singled out individual Genesis motifs and reduced them to a painted black-and-white contrast, and given also that the more spontaneous sketching spurred on a non-stop artistic process leading to new insights, then in the end, for such work over so many years, there only remain as an artistic medium either the mural or the woodcut. In the case on hand, Franz Bucher was able to put both possibilities into effect. The seven murals with the ceiling painting on the Creation theme in the Burgbach Schoolhouse in Zug were completed in autumn 1987. And now, the folder with the seven woodcuts lies before us: a temporary conclusion to an artistic sounding in all possible directions, sticking above all to a valid form and solution, with the background idea that this might be the groundwork of a gateway to new horizons.

Franz Bucher’s woodcuts are no banal rendition or reproduction of drawn or painted templates, even though single leaves can be traced back to well-tried Genesis motifs. Each individual woodcut stands alone, makes its own statement through different colouring; and above all the seven subjects harmonise together in the series and in the consequent handling of the “narrative,” forming a closed whole. The basic theme of evolving and growing conveys itself meaningfully through this medium, since the wooden stock cradling the image, with its tree rings and grain, seals in the traces of life and conveys these in the process of printing on to the paper. The artist cuts the brightness, the light, out of the woodblock by means of a lacerating tool, frees the surface area that the delicate colouring will cover, leaving ligaments and compartments that absorb the lush black. Franz Bucher is so sure in his cutting and notching that he can proceed in a spontaneous and eruptive way which mobilises the expressivity of the woodcut, fully in favour of statement and effect. Thus, each single sheet draws its tensional wealth out of the contrast between fragmented, often edgy moulding in black, and quick interplay of highlighted and harmonising tints. The characteristic of these woodcuts is certainly decided by the way the cutter stages his strong grasp, by the rhythmic interplay of form and colour, as well as by the three-dimensional quality which is achieved by the overlay, the changing proportions and the profound impression of colour.

Genesis in seven chapters; it is the artist’s comprehension and depiction of the creative, par excellence – how order arises out of chaos. In the trackless dark, light breaks in as a source of orientation and revelation and shows the way. Night gives parturition to the day (I). Land and Water separate to such a broad space that the horizon becomes the division between heaven and earth, between the earthly and the transcendental (II). The three

following sheets depict in close sequence the three stages of life: the iridescent and perturbed surface of a water-lily pond (III), the borderless sphere of the air in which weird birds appear (IV), and lastly, a glance into the thick tangle of a forest (V). Forming the conclusion of the series, there are two illustrations in which man emerges. First he is provided with animals: birds, horses, cows, and in his bondage to the earth seems to be about to sally forth from the lower right corner into the hazards of a future to be dared (VI). In the last sheet, we discern man and woman, how the pair, in a cowering and hesitating posture, seem to detach themselves from the ground and to decamp again into the mass (VII). In their purposeful stance and in their pointing gestures, the human figures accept their assigned duty: to use the earth, to cultivate, to conserve, to mould it, and thereby to shape out a civilisation.

Franz Bucher's concern in his contention with Creation finds no outlet in superficial recourse to literary guidelines. Nor does he attempt to mimic any portrayal of Genesis. His woodcuts are formed on deeper grounds. Quite plainly, he broaches the issue of creative potential which is endued with symbolic content. It raises the basic existential questions of man such as the why and the wherefore, and swings between the extreme poles of the universal origin of evolution and the human masses on the move.

The seven prints span the arch from the beginning to the end of time. In this respect, the work is of great contemporary interest: for if the last print of the set speaks of the beginning of the eighth day of creation, then we as viewers all are incorporated, since we are all still at work at the great Assignment, even if sheer danger to all forms of life today and the resultant despair make the Apocalypse appear to be not far away. Thus we may read the last sheet, in the opposite direction up to a point, as a bleak vision of the end of time.

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