

"The Drawings of Moshe Kupferman" by Ad Petersen. The article, which was written in French and was translated into English and Hebrew, is derived from the catalogue aforementioned. Appears on the site in Hebrew and in English

THE DRAWINGS OF MOSHE KUPFERMAN
by Ad Petersen

The first time one confronts Moshe Kupferman's drawings, one is immediately fascinated by his technique. Without exception, all his drawings present a surface going from ash gray to dark gray, almost black. If he prefers graphite, he mixes it with other materials like painting with oil diluted with turpentine and oily pastels. Sometimes it is an indefinable violet color standing out from the whole. Other times one has the impression that the white or gray color of the pastel has served to recover, more or less, a previous layer. If one is sensitive to the smells of paper and books, it is enough to hold Kupferman's drawings in your hands and, even with your eyes closed, you can recognize them since the sweetish and spicy odor emanating from the mixture of paper, pencil, paint, pastel and turpentine is unique. A subtle pleasure alas denied the visitor to the exhibition. Kupferman says that, to look at his drawings, you have to hold them. That's true for drawings in general because of their intimate and direct nature and the tactile quality of the paper; but it is even more true of Kupferman's drawings because of the heavy paper he uses, which he works on both sides, which he folds, soaks and scrapes, which he handles so much and so well that, instead of being the blank paper serving as a base for the drawing, the sheet becomes an object itself.

Kupferman works the paper as a peasant works the land. A continuous daily toil, the same gestures, the same materials, the same activities over and over. Most often, the drawing begins with an occupation of the surface of the paper which consists of drawing arbitrary lines on it. These forms don't represent anything; the hand wanders over the paper and reacts to the size and proportions of the sheet as well as to unconscious impulses.

These more or less automatic operations are transformed, alternate with other, more conscious operations. With the aid of a ruler, Kupferman pulls horizontal or vertical lines over the entire length or breadth of the paper; often, with a blunt knife, he carves furrows in the material that come out on the other side. These operations are often executed on both sides of the sheet. The lines are rubbed out, pumiced with sandpaper or almost erased with a rag and then covered with more or less transparent or opaque painting or white pastel and then serve as a base for the following, horizontal or vertical lines or bands. He also uses a roller. Often, during these operations, the paper is folded into two equal parts and the front is worked so that the lines of the back are painted or at least leave traces on the other half. Thus, you can have a whole series of drawings in which the right and left halves are different while preserving certain common points. They live together on a single surface.

There is another form of coexistence in the sheets that combine schematic drawings. It looks as if the artist has attempted on a single sheet and in various ways to find the point of departure of a drawing or that he has experimented with a procedure. These drawings,

populated drawings, as Kupferman calls them, have a special force of attraction because they are often lighter and less worked; they reveal the artist's fascinating method.

Some of Kupferman's drawings have been worked so long and so laboriously that the paper seems about to give out. Other times, the artist does not go so far, he seems to have reached what he calls the "saturation point" sooner. It is the completion, the moment when he lets go. It is that final aspect we discover. We can only suppose, guess, the different stages preceding it. We see the works as they have been "abandoned" by the artist. Never will the spectator, who always come from an opposite direction, be able to feel the drawing in the same way as its creator and, each time he tries to penetrate the work, he will always find his own reflection.

This is particularly true of Kupferman's works which give the impression of being internalized and closed but which, in fact, demonstrate a great desire to communicate. Perhaps this is why such a remarkable intensity emanates from them. These drawings are definitely non-figurative and always have been even though one sometimes finds in them a vague trace of elements that might be figurative like grids, barriers or some landscape. Kupferman does not refute these associations but maintains that he never intended to stimulate them. In fact, his works express especially and incessantly an internal reality, a state of soul, avoiding all concrete association. The terminology that wants this to be "lyrical abstraction," "fundamental painting," "process art" or "conceptual art" has no understanding of these works because their center of gravity is outside these kinds of generalizations. Some of these terms can certainly be attributed to them since process, for example, is very important in Kupferman's work but in no case can they account for its essence.

The impression of beauty created by the drawings seems to be determined by the subtle, elaborate and sensitive treatment of the materials, themselves very simple. Even and balanced, the drawings most often cover the whole surface of the paper but balance is not a synonym for calm; a tension reigns in them and one can read the effort in it. The tone, serious reserved and severe, is muted, never easy or pleasant but subjugated and insistent. Layer on layer, the multiple manipulations have left sediments; a dense network of lines, painting, successively added bands whose result attains a certain balance with the last operations on the paper.

The cumulative aspect characteristic of Kupferman's works (especially his drawings) goes with his sense of the close correspondence between his life and his work: a direct and strongly present relationship. Work is an integral part of his life, its echo. Kupferman feels it as the inevitable consequence of his conception of the world and of the experiences he has undergone: it is what gives a meaning to his life, a justification to his work which he submits, like himself, to stern demands. Drawings and paintings must meet those demands in the world of art and in his own work or else they have no raison d'etre. That is what gives his works their emotional and spiritual charge. So it is not surprising that Moshe

Kupferman is a great admirer of Bram van Velde.