

Jens Hausmann's architecture paintings are reflections on beauty and banal reality, power and transience, hopeful utopias and decline, a belief in progress and skeptical melancholy. The paintings show us the elegant villas of a well-to-do, cultivated upper class, designed in the tradition of Bauhaus or the International Style, whose prototypes were created by architects like Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, or Richard Neutra.

The villas mark the history of architecture over one hundred years: from the 1920s to today. The 1950s are present in the sometimes extreme elongation of the formats, the 1970s, especially oriented towards the future, are represented by Brutalism with its roots—with Le Courbusier's *béton brut* and his Unités d'Habitation—again in the 1950s. The buildings in Jens Hausmann's paintings are archetypes of this modernism, complete with its pathos formulas: shed roofs, panorama windows, and broad terraces with pools; glass walls alternate with closed, block-like walls.

It is the idea of the building as an abstract sculpture, removed from the original purpose of a building, namely to offer first and foremost protection from the dangers and forces of nature. Here, everything is quite different, oriented to the future, dynamic; the battle cry is, "Look how modern I am!" This is where the "new man," as they said in the 1920s, lives. This "white modernism" is the expression of a utopia, of a better, more pure and more beautiful world. In some paintings, the old, grey, and ugly world appears dimly in the background.

Some motifs are from Brazil, where Jens Hausmann frequently spends time; there he experiences modernism's claim to totality in a very pointed way. In South America he observes how the desire to bring society forward causes a modernization wave to run over the country with great dynamism and speed. For the artist, the democratic basic idea of modern architecture is replaced by the display of power, wealth, and luxury.

With their strong contrasts of light and shadow, the motifs aim to create mystery and suspense, like in the films by Hitchcock, or Edward Hopper's paintings. Time seems to stand still, nothing is moving, the scenery is deserted. And yet we sense a latent danger, some kind of drama might be happening or about to happen. As transparent as these buildings with their glass walls are, they still hide a great deal, and as inviting as the open entrances and passages seem to be, the scenery is bunker-like and repelling. The perfection of the design kills off anything vibrant. The

virtuoso play between open and closed, invitation and repulsion is symbolized by the glass that forms both a protective border against the environment, and yet is open to it, simultaneously firm and transparent, hard and fragile.

Details like dead trees or debris from demolition and weathering, together with the often prevalent twilight, demonstrate that this arcadia is threatened by decline and decay. *Et in arcadia ego*, the Baroque motif that locates death in even the most beautiful and paradisiacal landscape, is given a contemporary form here. *Trouble in Paradise*, as the title of Ernst Lubitsch's classic film says. We might also remember Hubert Robert, the painter of ruins, who showed the architecture of antiquity in decay.

In this sense, Hausmann's villas, precisely in their perfect beauty, are signs of *vanitas* and *memento mori*. The human creative will, the striving for beauty, stands against the forces of nature that have their own laws. However, these tropical, exuberantly growing plants are not in the jungle, but in an enclosed area, a garden that is presented as an abandoned, contaminated idyll. The pool is a symbol for the appropriation of nature: its substance, water, has been deprived of everything that is natural, it serves solely as a reflective surface and is completely integrated into the architectural design.

At the beginning of Jens Hausmann's work process are found images, e.g. from magazines or the internet, or also his own photos. These are processed on the computer, and often the artist draws the images or paints them with watercolors to liberate himself from the aesthetics of the photograph. The preparatory drawing is then transferred directly to the canvas without the aid of a projector, and small mistakes of perspective may creep in at that stage. The vibrancy resulting from this is reinforced by the brushstroke, the vibrato of the application of oil paints, often in several layers. At the end, it is this vibrancy, the breathing of the painting's surface, that transforms these architectural images into impressive works of art.

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