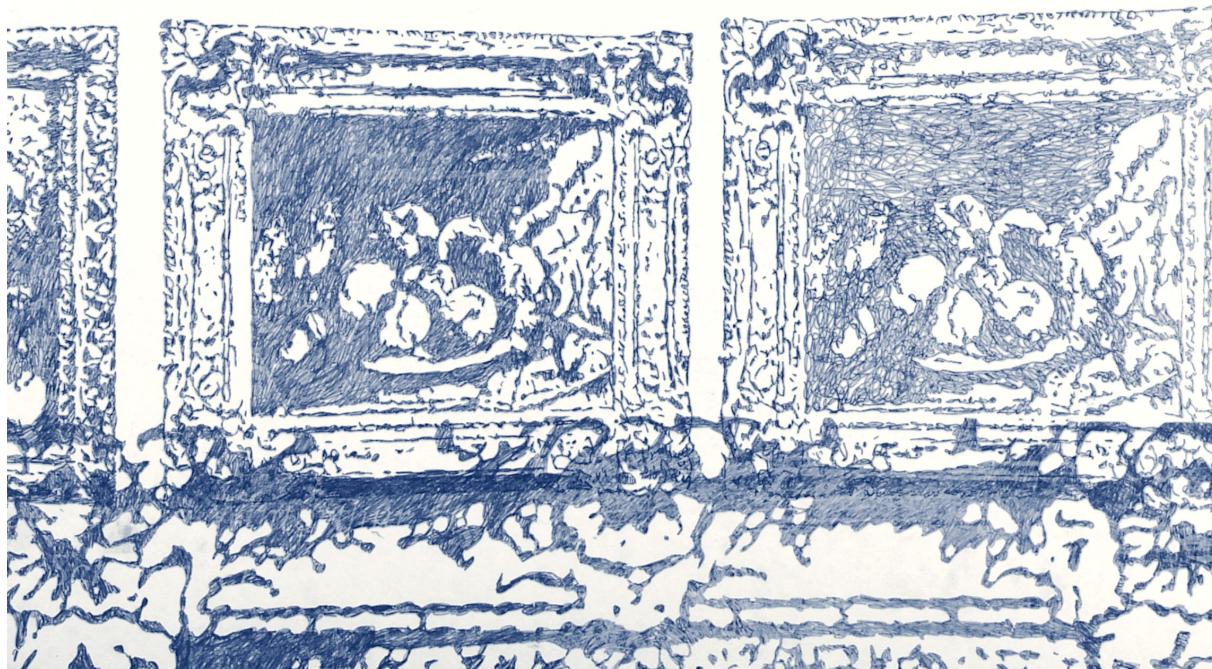


Sibylle Omlin Wunderblock



Cézanne à Winterthur #6 2003

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, in association with our powers of memory, repeatedly used the act of writing as a symbol and also analyzed the tools we write with:

"I can choose a writing surface that can for an indeterminate period of time preserve the note entrusted to it, that is, a

*sheet of paper that I write on in ink. I am thus given a 'permanent memory trace'. The disadvantage of this procedure consists of the fact that the capacity of the writing surface is soon exhausted. The sheet is full, has no room for more notations and I am forced to take up another blank sheet."*¹

Freud found that a slate as a writing surface was also wanting as a description of the power of memory:

*"If I write, for instance, with chalk on a slate, I have an ever-ready surface that is receptive over an endless period of time, whose notations I can destroy as soon as they no longer interest me. The disadvantage here is that I cannot preserve a permanent trace. If I write new notes on the slate, I must erase those that covered it beforehand. In the devices we use to substitute for our memory, unlimited receptivity and the preservation of permanent traces seem to exclude each other. We must either renew the receptive surface or destroy the notes."*²

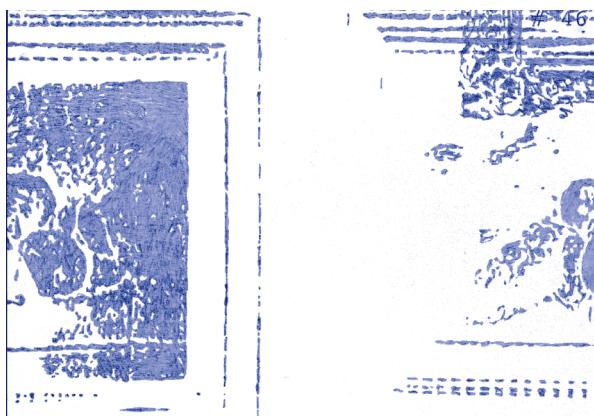
In association with our 'psychological perception', Freud was interested in what stimulated perception to store permanent memory traces, as well as in the fact that new perceptive traces can repeatedly overwrite older ones. In view of this fact, Freud studied a writing tool that at the turn of the century was put on the market under the name of 'Wunderblock'[mystic writing pad]. It was a small device that promised to achieve more than a sheet of paper or a slate.

*"The 'Wunderblock' is a paper-framed tablet out of dark brown resin or wax substance on which a thin, transparent sheet is laid, attached at the upper end to the wax tablet and loose at the lower end. This sheet is the more interesting part of the small apparatus. It consists of two layers that can be raised from each other except from the sides. The upper layer is a transparent celluloid plate, the lower one a thin, i.e., filmy, wax paper.[...] The mystic writing pad is used by writing on the celluloid plate, which in turn transfers this to the sheet covering the wax tablet. [...] A pointed stylus scores or scratches the surface and produces the writing. With the Wunderblock this scratching is not directly effective but needs the mediation of the sheet above it."*³

The apparatus called 'Wunderblock' appears useful to me for describing Markus Schwander's drawings. The drawing technique that the artist used for two series

from the years 2001 to 2004 includes several Wunderblock elements. For one, the idea of scoring: writing as engraved scratches that leave an imprint. For another, the indirectness: the two Wunderblock sheets transfer the writing from one to the other. And third, the Wunderblock is a device in which a deletion of the old writing is necessary for all the new inscriptions, yet the old inscriptions remain indelibly inscribed on the sheet as a fine trace.

Markus Schwander is interested in the benefits a drawing reaps from indirect methods regarding the subject, the drawing technique and – probably the most important motive – regarding the medial superposition. Markus Schwander's drawing not only manifest a combination of images that stem from superimposed tracings and



Cézanne à Winterthur #46 2004

overlaps, but also the phenomena of concealment, deletion and omission that are always in play.

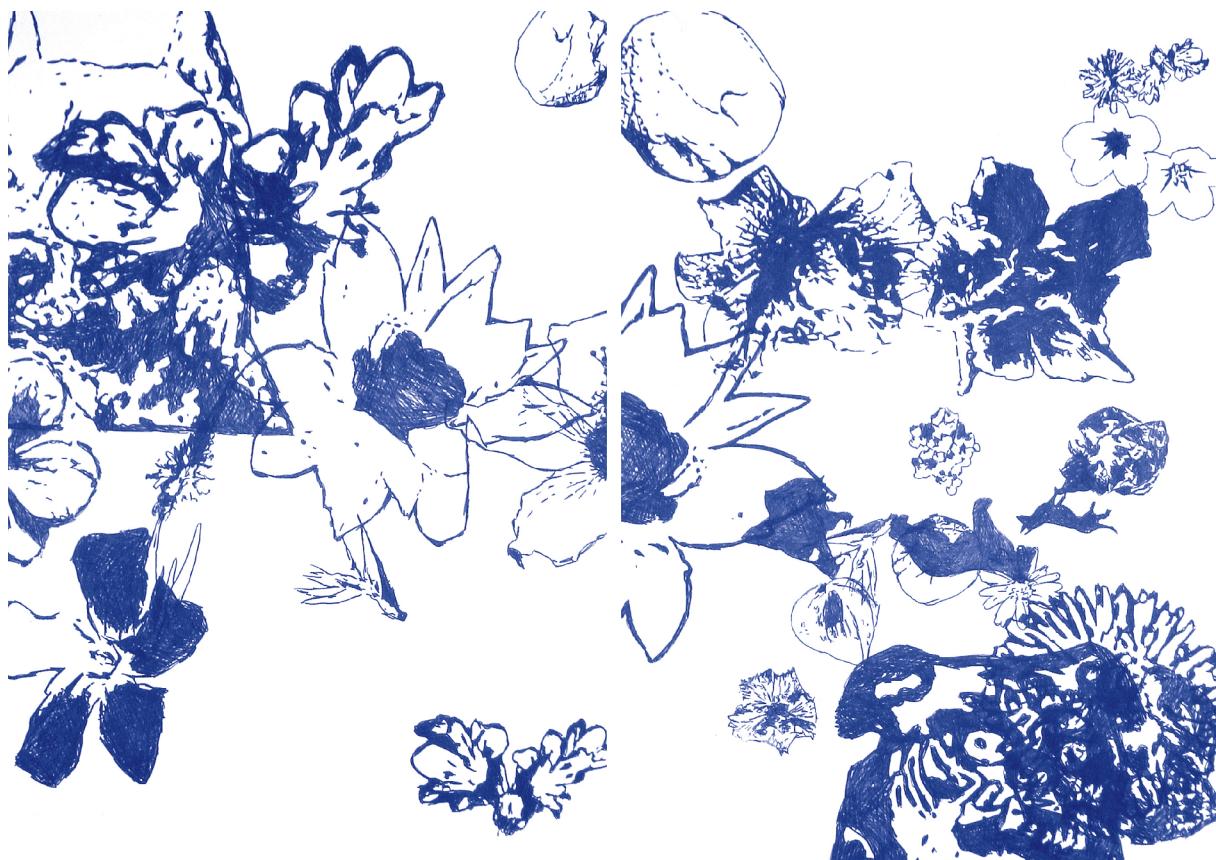
For the series *Dogs and Flowers* from 2002, the artist developed a new technique during a stay in South Africa. He transferred the drawing to a white sheet of drawing paper by means of ballpoint pen and carbon paper. The positive of the original model becomes a negative when traced. Whereby the model is itself a negative: the subject of the drawing results from the tracing process. Photographs, which the artist manipulates at his computer and assembles together, are printed in black-and-white with resulting strong contours. Traced with carbon paper, the photographic supplementation is reduced to outlines and blue fields.

This double negative process, which cites photographs, brings together – to all

appearances blindly – things that do not match: blossoming idylls and sheep dogs, teeth bared in a snarl and flower clusters, bougainvillea and an iron-wrought gate with warning signs. The mustering of aggression, domestic peace and intimidation directed outwards requires its own registration system &sup4 that encompasses visual impressions, photographic memory pictures and graphic imprinting technology.

The complex method of re-tracing pictures, contours and graphic sketches had already occupied Schwander before undertaking these drawings. For his works with lifelines around 1994, he collected the palms of people who were meeting together for one reason or another. During the meet-

The project of the transformation of the lines on individual palms from which physiognomic character can be read was continued in the work *Konferenz [conference]* from 1995, which shows a small power circle, namely the palm lines of six people who, through their social function, (can) directly practice power over the artist: a gallerist, a museum director, a policeman, a collector, a politician and a business manager. The palm lines were enlarged, cast in a positive process as rubber stamps, stained with stamp dye and mounted in frames. The question of the individuality of a palm line was linked to the question of power. The people who left behind the pictures of their palms to the artist did



Dogs & Flowers #7, 2002

ing the groups were asked to provide the palms of their hands for photocopying. For *Sammlung IV [collection IV]*, for example, a Xerox machine was set up at a gallery's vernissage and the guests could photocopy their hands. From these photocopies of pairs of hands, the artist made ceramic reliefs, which one year later were shown at the same gallery. The negative of the palm had changed back again to a positive.

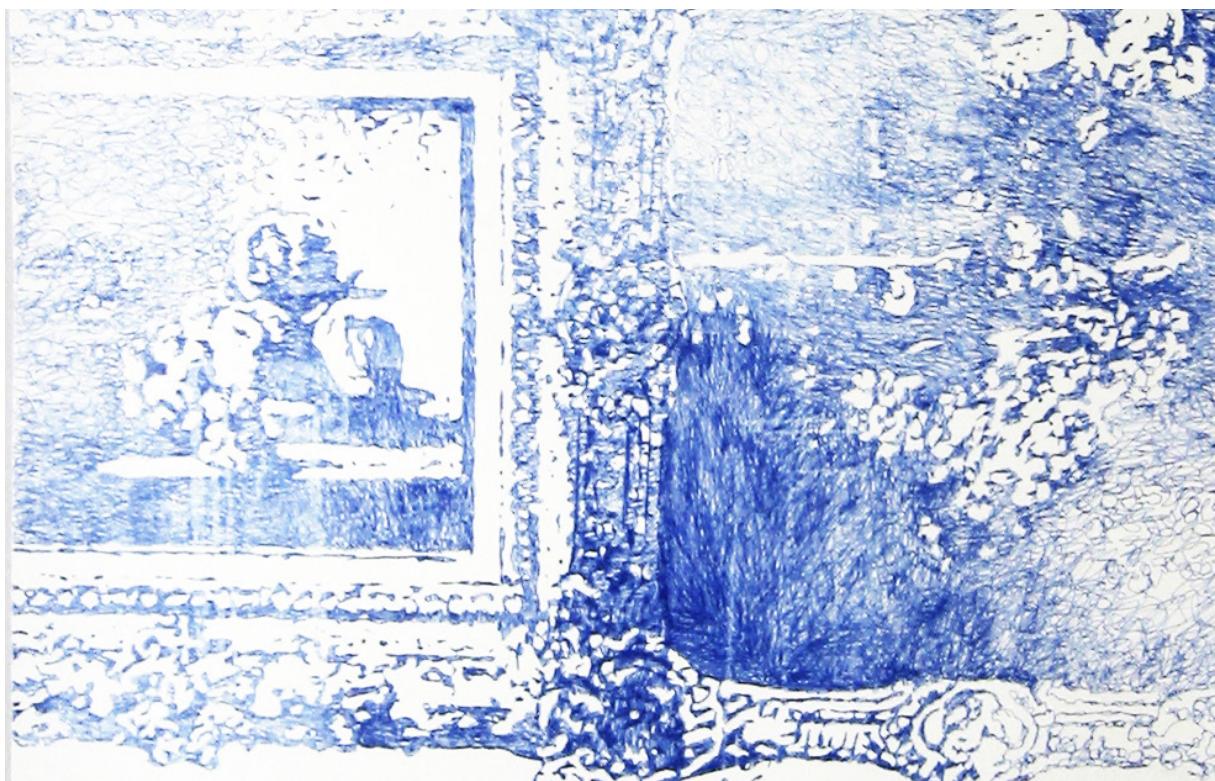
not consider themselves powerful, since they too were dependent on other powers. Yet, in individual cases, they do determine the biographies of others. The dye on the stamp can leave behind traces and these lifelines can then themselves serve as stamps.

What is interesting in the work *Konferenz* is the fact that a picture can become a stamp. A picture can leave behind

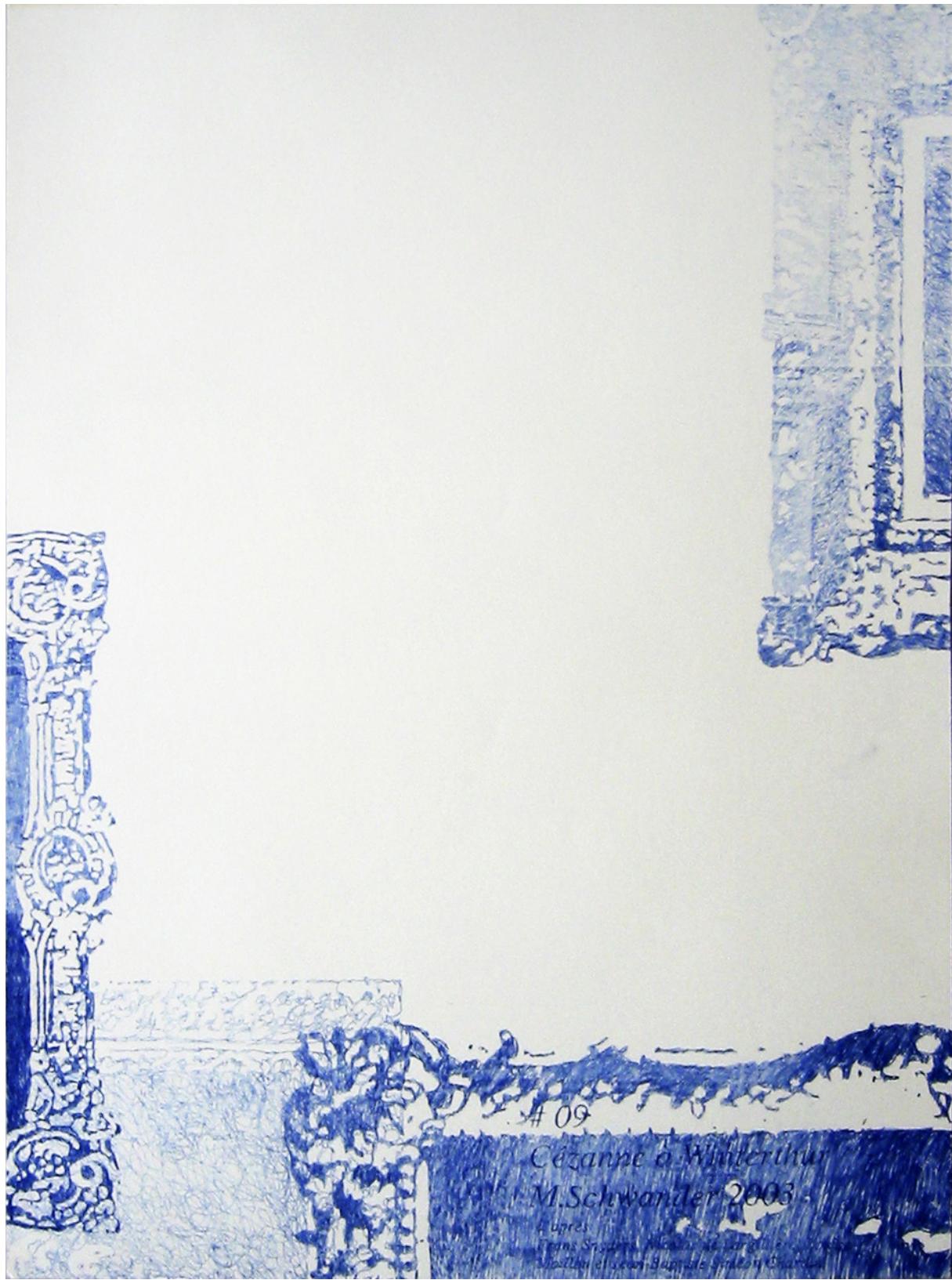
traces. Pictures are themselves reservoirs of visual information, similar to a 'Wunderblock'. They can absorb memories and release them again. Pictures are capable of bringing together in a small space the remote and the disparate in time. This fact is what occupied Markus Schwander in *Dogs and Flowers*, but also in the series of drawings on carbon paper that he did one year later and called *Cézanne à Winterthur* [*Cézanne in Winterthur*]. *Cézanne à Winterthur* is a stand-in title, the artist writes: "What I like about it is that it suggests a trip that Cézanne never took, but his pictures did." The starting point was Schwander's research into French still lifes, which began at the collection of Oskar Reinhardt *Römerholz* in Winterthur. He photographed still lifes with fruits exclusively in museums in Switzerland and Germany, that is, pictures that had left the artists' native country through purchases abroad. In his studio he then copied the different paintings by Renoir, Courbet, Cézanne complete with frames, using his tracing technique on large sheets of paper. He inscribed the drawings with the names of the artists and with technical specifications. In this way Markus Schwander has taken pictures from museums often far apart from each other

and united them in a new form of still life, a still life of paintings: a musée imaginaire that relies on the visual memory of the art viewer.

What is striking is the layout of the drawings: the photocopied paintings are often cropped at the edge of the sheet; there are large spaces between the pictures: a so-called Petersburg hanging on white paper. It is not so much a question of creating thematic affinities between 19th century paintings, but of disambiguating the ornamental structure in the paintings plus frame via a method of tracing. The technique of the indirect (multiple re-copying, compiling and tracing), which plays a game of conceal then reveal, aims at a different visualization of the works, aims at the pictures' subconscious. The original picture models have become the pre-conscious of Markus Schwander's drawings. The issue here is about imprinting these traces as a permanent memory on the sheet of paper. The space is limited; the drawing must therefore always begin again from the beginning. Freud's fear that a permanent memory can only be had at the price of partial overwriting and deletion is transformed by Markus Schwander into a multi-layered copy process. At the heart of the



Cézanne à Winterthur #3 (detail) 2003



Cézanne à Winterthur #9, 2003

matter is carbon tracing paper: it bears the permanently composed pictures of photographs and photocopies as well as tracings. What is traced is passed on as the print left by using the picture. Thus in the drawings there emerges the impression of a collective pictorial memory, which carries within it the deployment of the pictures.

1 Sigmund Freud, Notiz über den 'Wunderblock' in: *Das Ich und das Es. Metapsychologische Schriften*, Fischer paperback, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, p. 313. (Translated by J.H.)

2 See fn. 1, p. 313/314.

3 See fn. 1, p. 315.

4 I have borrowed the term 'registration system' from Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 – 1900*, Munich, 1985.

5 Mail from the artist on 16 May 2003.

Translated by Jeanne Haunschild