

近年来，弗里德里希·埃因霍夫（Friedrich Einhoff）在中国的艺术家、藏家和学者中声名鹊起，这一现象令人颇为意外和震惊。究竟是什么让这位艺术家的作品在中国观众中产生如此强烈的共鸣？中国观众在他身上又看到了什么？这或许是两个完全独立的话题，然而观察到埃因霍夫的作品在中国引起的情感回响，不禁让人思考艺术家画面背后必然隐藏着一种强大的能量源泉——而鉴于埃因霍夫从未踏足中国，这就更令人惊叹了。

这一切还是得从头说起。1936年，弗里德里希·埃因霍夫出生于德国马格德堡，他的父亲弗里德里希·G·埃因霍夫（Friedrich G. Einhoff）是当地工艺美术学校的校长，也是20世纪20年代一群表现主义写实画家中的重要人物。显然，埃因霍夫的父亲是一个有魄力的人，在德国历史上的黑暗时期仍保持了对自己事业的专注，同时也使家庭免遭困境。相比之下，埃因霍夫从小就身体状况不佳，时常需要接受护理，并常常被送往不同的疗养院治疗呼吸疾病。因此，从很小的时候起，他便学会享受孤独和隔绝的时刻，这也启迪了他此后的艺术创作。他的一部分作品描绘了许多病床和药浴的画面，尤其是在他晚年经历听力损失的阶段。此外，他的妻子在50岁左右罹患阿兹海默症，需要他亲自照料。尽管生活并不容易，他却仍是一名备受爱戴的老师，在许多学生的生命中留下了难以磨灭的印记。学生们形容他敏感而富有洞察力，能够敏锐地体察到他们自身的问题，而不是一个所谓培养门徒的人。换言之，他是一个富有同理心的人，不仅承受着自己的磨难，还对别人的挣扎感同身受。他可以十分温煦，甚至很有幽默感，但有时他也会把自己隔绝起来，陷入沉默和隐遁。

作为艺术家，他创作欲旺盛，留下了数千幅大大小小的作品。他本人显然对尺幅不以为意，如果一定要区分的话，他似乎更喜欢小尺幅作品的亲密感，并不追求所谓“宏大杰作”<sup>1</sup>。因此，他会以同样的强度在大大小小的画面上创作，不预设目标。在某种程度上，图像是经由他的身体、思想、心灵和双手创作成形的。他的学生德克·霍夫曼（Dirk Hoffmann）曾多次前往他的工作室参观，在那里他看到的是一个经过精心策划的场域，到处都摆放着作品，不论是悬挂、斜倚还是平放在地，无处不在且都经过精心布置。埃因霍夫还有一套盒子档案系统，他把部分作品保存在里面，以便日后重新评估甚至是重新创作。他做事井井有条，但也极具开放性。埃因霍夫的创作从始至终都真正意义上地处在“过程中”。对他来说，创作意味着让图像在自己手下生长，再逐层叠加痕迹。这些痕迹或来自画笔、拼贴和他所选择的任何工具或材料，也会来自创作之外。许多作品都是以他在媒体平台或跳蚤市场上发现的照片为基础创作的，这些作品实际承载着他选择融入其中的人物痕迹。正是这种绘画和存在主义痕迹的密集叠加与张力，创造并激发了他作品中的能量。

---

<sup>1</sup> 在接受贝琳达·格蕾丝·加德纳（Belinda Grace Gardner）采访时，他这样评价艺术家艾德·金霍兹（Ed Kienholz）：“我一直很喜欢艺术品所产生的这种压倒性的效果，而且基本上我始终在寻求这种效果。由于我青睐的往往是偏安静的色调，我其实不是能够激发这种效果的艺术家的，但我非常希望通过作品来引发某种刺痛感。”

有人告诉我，正是这种图像的丰富性首先引起了中国艺术家与鉴赏家的关注。人们可以从他的绘画中看到许多东西，也愿意花很多时间去品味、解读他的绘画特质。正如著名艺术史学家沃纳·霍夫曼（Werner Hofmann）在2009年汉斯·普拉切克艺术与写作奖颁奖典礼上<sup>2</sup>所称赞的那样：“埃因霍夫将他的艺术置于某种‘中间’的状态，素描和绘画相互消融，呈现出一种近似毁灭性行为的理形。在那里，虚无感把骷髅般的人物轮廓包围起来，暗暗地充满侘寂；在那里，死亡的残酷与生命的绚烂如出一辙。”

这仅仅是演说词的开篇，但已经提出了诸多问题。首先，很有意思的一点是，中文里并不会特别区分“painting”（绘画）和“drawing”（素描）。这是一个只存在于西方语境下的问题，但这也说明埃因霍夫创作中多类型融合的特质得到了大家的关注。其次，“创造”和“消亡”的主题既与艺术家的绘画过程相关，但显然也暗指埃因霍夫的童年经历。他在童年期间不仅体弱多病，而且身处二战的环境之中——当时大部分男性都参军服役，于是在他的童年时代，唯一能看到的便是这些退伍伤员。年轻的埃因霍夫模仿他们的样子，也拄着拐杖走路，以模仿那种受伤的自我形象，体现了他亦将这种破碎的样子纳为自己的一部分。

这一主题由始至终持续萦绕于他的艺术创作，事实上，随着时间的推移，它甚至变得更为突出。分解的四肢和看似“脱离”的身体部位在埃因霍夫的图像宇宙中扮演着重要的角色。许多写作者都不约而同地提到同一幅画作——创作于2015年的《膝盖》（Knie）——一个从左上方进入画面的形状在画面中心以大约100°角弯曲。其表面有刮挠痕迹，看上去像发了霉一样，而胫骨般的物体直直地垂落，并缓慢融入背景的暗黑之中——一幅非常具有神秘感的画面。然而，它表明埃因霍夫的绘画作品远比想象中更丰富。起初大家可能会问，膝盖是什么？答案是：“可以说膝盖基本上总是向前迈进。每隔半米向内弯曲，再隔半米向上伸直。（……）我自己没有原则，只有坚定的生存和加速的决心，我拥有经验，而非原则。（……）我不是膝盖骨，也不是膝窝，不是小腿，也不是大腿，这些都已经消亡；我是介于它们之间的中间物。”<sup>3</sup>这是德国著名电影制片人亚历山大·克鲁格（Alexander Kluge）在1979年拍摄的影片《女爱国者》（“Die Patriotin”）中描述维兰德下士的膝盖<sup>4</sup>时所说。而这又是对克里斯蒂安·摩根斯特恩（Christian Morgenstern）于1905年创作的诗歌的重新诠释。

## Das Knie

Ein Knie geht einsam durch die Welt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts!  
Es ist kein Baum! Es ist kein Zelt!  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.

<sup>2</sup> 普拉切克奖授予在文学领域也取得成就的艺术家；因此，埃因霍夫在德国也被认为是一位文学家。

<sup>3</sup> 亚历山大·克鲁格，《女爱国者：文字/图像 1-6》，法兰克福出版社，1980，pp. 54-55 & 171

<sup>4</sup> 引用此段以向发现这一参考文献的克劳斯·米弗斯表示感谢。

Im Kriege ward einmal ein Mann  
erschossen um und um.  
Das Knie allein blieb unverletzt –  
als wär's ein Heiligtum.

Seitdem geht's einsam durch die Welt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.  
Es ist kein Baum, es ist kein Zelt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.<sup>5</sup>

亚历山大·克鲁格在这部 1979 年拍摄的长片开头引用了荒诞文学大师摩根斯特恩的诗作。而埃因霍夫是通过别的途径了解到这首诗，并在他的一些书中重印了它。但他也知道亚历山大·克鲁格的电影，以及将“膝盖”作为“在-中间”这样的隐喻解读。埃因霍夫是一名热忱的读者，从 1961 到 1966 年间，他曾专门研读文学和哲学著作。他十分推崇托马斯·伯恩哈德 (Thomas Bernhard)、弗兰兹·卡夫卡 (Franz Kafka)、萨缪尔·贝克特 (Samuel Beckett) 等作家，当然还有更早一辈的克里斯汀·摩根斯特恩。而这些作家的共性便是对人类境遇和磨难的深切关注。索伦·齐克果 (Søren Kierkegaard)、阿尔贝·加缪 (Albert Camus)、马丁·海德格尔 (Martin Heidegger) 等思想家影响了整整一代文化工作者、艺术家和“新浪潮”电影人，也在埃因霍夫的作品中产生了深远的共鸣。

这构成了埃因霍夫艺术理念发展的大背景。在那个高度存在主义的时代，埃因霍夫的生活过得并不容易。他的妻子 50 多岁就病倒了，慢慢失去记忆和心智。关于他去养老院看望妻子，有一个十分感人的故事。当时她已经认不出他很久了。一天，埃因霍夫直接从工作室出发去看她，他的妻子显得焦虑不安，直到她把埃因霍夫拉近身旁，并把他的手举到自己的鼻子前——闻到埃因霍夫手指上的颜料味道，她放松下来，开始朝他微笑。<sup>6</sup>

---

5

一个孤独的膝盖遗世徘徊，  
此为膝盖，别无其他，  
既非帐篷，也非树木，  
此为膝盖，并无其他。

战场上曾有一人，  
被打得遍体鳞伤，  
只有膝盖毫发无损，  
就像传说中的圣人。

自此，它便开始遗世徘徊，  
此为膝盖，别无其他，  
既非帐篷，也非树木，  
仅为膝盖，再无其他。

<sup>6</sup> 这段故事是埃因霍夫本人告诉克劳斯·米弗斯的。

埃因霍夫十多年来每天都去探望妻子，尽自己最大的能力照顾她。同时他依然也会照顾身边的其他人。他的学生雅科夫·布鲁马斯（Jaakov Blumas）讲过这样一件事：他想为自己的作品编一本画册，但没有足够的资金。后来埃因霍夫伸出援手，而且不求回报，只要求留下一本画册供他创作。书成后，埃因霍夫把这本重新绘制的画册作为礼物送给了好友，同时也是一名拥有丰富经验的印刷商和设计师汉斯·韦克尔（Hans Weckerle）。三重慷慨！——首先，埃因霍夫帮忙赞助了一本书，然后又将它转变成艺术品，接着又把这份艺术品赠予朋友。

每个认识埃因霍夫的人都提到他会不遗余力地帮助他人，很多时候甚至超出了自己的职责范围。他的学生和密友都对他充满感激和爱戴。然而，埃因霍夫也需要独处的时刻，有时他会隐遁很长一段时间，不接任何电话。因此，埃因霍夫更加立体的形象浮现了出来：既热情友好，也寡言内敛，拥有令人尊敬的气质。

埃因霍夫对他人的真挚，在他另一位好友发起的一系列展览中得到了回应。艺术家托马斯·里克（Thomas Rieck）曾组织了一些聚会，艺术家们会带来他们未完成、未解决或不尽如人意的作品。然后，这些作品将在组内进行交换，这样一个艺术家就可以“重新创作”另一个艺术家的画作。他把这种方法称为“Überzeichnung”，德语中这个词有两重意思：第一，意为在另一个图像上绘画（“Über”在德语中可表示“在……之上”）；第二种则是“超级绘画”（“Über”在德语中还可表示“超级”），即一种清晰甚至过度清晰的画。最终创作出来的作品会在题为“跨越”（Trans）的展览中展出，展览标题取“交叉”“两者之间”之意，在这里是更指两位艺术家之间。有趣的是，此举并非向艺术家的作者身份问题发起质疑，而是一场探索两位艺术家如何在艺术上相遇相联的实验。

这非常符合埃因霍夫的性格，因为他总是努力与他人建立情感连接。“Überzeichnung”正是对这种个人期待的艺术化表达。这些作品还强调了间隙、介于两者之间的空间以及交叉，恰如之前那幅关于膝盖的神秘绘画——膝盖作为隐喻，指涉连接的场域，而这片场域同时又充满动态和变化。

也许这听起来可能有些牵强，但汉字的“人”字看起来有点像“膝盖”的形象。“人”字里包含两条线，因为单独一个无法独自站立。这跟“跨越”系列不谋而合，需要两位艺术家的合作才能成立。鉴于我们所讨论的是隐喻而非物体本身，我不再做过多展开，但我们或许可以接受两个实体之间的结构性相似。

无需太过深入地探讨西方语境下“个体性”的概念，传统上个体性总是聚焦于个人，正如笛卡尔（Descartes）的名言：“我思故我在”。如果埃因霍夫不是艺术家，他或许会说：“人我相关，故我存在。”

西方思想的变化有几个不同的起源。举两个例子。著名的伊曼纽尔·列维纳斯（Emmanuel Lévinas）有一句名言：“在我之前，他者已经存在，并给予我姓名。”<sup>7</sup> 列

<sup>7</sup> 马赛厄斯·施赖伯（Mathias Schreiber）如此评价伊曼纽尔·列维纳斯：“人是一种疯狂的动物，能够进行这样的思维过程：他者在我之前，因而比我更重要。我看到他在看我，而他看我也一样。在他的‘面容’中有一种无限的陌生感，从中‘全人类’都看着我，并说：‘你不会杀人’。他者眼中‘无限的痕迹’使我感到无比珍贵。这迫使我为他承担起全面的责任。”

维纳斯出生于 1906 年，战争中在战俘营中幸存下来，而他的其他家人都遭纳粹杀害，而后提出“他者伦理”（ethics of the other）作为对自身苦难的回应。另一个例子则是 1900 年出生的汉斯-格奥尔格·伽达默尔（Hans-Georg Gadamer），他指出：“真正有教养的人是那些克服自爱，从而能听见他者想说的话的人。”他在专著《真理与方法》（*Truth and Method*）中写道，真理是在对话中作为一种认识行为出现的：“如我所言，在这个世界上了解自我其实是一件难事。这意味着要了解彼此。这在道德上、而非逻辑上，是人类最为艰巨的任务。我们必须学会看到，他者是我们自爱和以自我为中心的首要限制。”<sup>8</sup>换言之，要抵达“自我”，必须经由对他者的深刻了解，才能回溯自我（自性）。

我们知道弗里德里希·埃因霍夫读书广博且求知欲旺盛，但我们无法确定他是否熟悉上述两位哲学家。他读过雅克·拉康（Jacques Lacan）的作品，<sup>9</sup>这位杰出的法国精神分析学家坚信，人类并不先于其互动而存在。事实上，“个体是通过与他人相互缠连的内在联系而出现，并成为其中的一部分。”在伦敦弗洛伊德博物馆的一场视频会议上，吴冠军教授也谈到拉康曾学习中文，试图通过汉语结构来解构自我、探索无意识。<sup>10</sup>

或许，亚洲的一些知识传到了德国，进而对弗里德里希·埃因霍夫产生了影响？——显然，其中似乎有一些共同特征，也有一些有意思的误读。这些都无从考证，而我们可以确认的是，埃因霍夫的朋友托马斯·里克对亚洲文化十分感兴趣，经常前往印度。正是他引介了“跨越”（Trans）的概念，这个概念在埃因霍夫的作品中演化为“交叉”和“在-中间”，即两个人、“你”和“我”之间的空隙。看埃因霍夫肖像画的时间越长，人们越会发现其中的变化。乍看之下，人物似乎自成一体，困顿于自己体内；而随着时间的推移，人们意识到他们蕴含着某种内在能量，让观者与他们发生连接，甚至产生共感。他们中的大多数都拥有在直观的情感层面与观众互动的强大转化力。

在这个意义上，埃因霍夫的作品并不“关于”任何主题。它们不展示、不解释、不叙事。它们就在那儿，传递着艺术家向作品投注的内在能量。正是这一特质让这些作品某种意义上又契合了中国艺术的概念。<sup>11</sup>作为艺术家，埃因霍夫时常感到有必要让自己隐遁或只与志同道合者围聚。甚至就像竹林七贤，埃因霍夫有时更倾向在默默无闻和远离权力中心的地方开展创作。传统上，中国艺术以“道”的视角关注自然无为的力量，埃因霍夫则专注于人性；如前所述，他在德国亦是文人般的形象，精通文学和哲学，并于 2009 年荣获汉斯·普拉切克艺术与写作奖。甚至他的美学表达，即极度简约的色彩尺度和层次丰富的黑色色调，也与中国水墨传统有异曲同工之妙。原因何在？埃因霍夫为何能够轻而易举地跨越文化边界进行无碍交流？这些问题或许永远无法得到确切的答案。不过，关于他我们还是可以说，他能够将自己生命中各种苦难和悲伤的碎片重新融合，凝聚成一股谦逊之力。他能够将当下的社会生活转化为充满关怀、尊

---

引自网页，2023.6.27：<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/der-blick-des-anderen-a-26b5919f-0002-0001-0000-000045424924>

<sup>8</sup> SWR2 Wissen：甘特·巴赫曼，《汉斯-格奥尔格·伽达默尔——了解的哲学》。引自网页，2023.6.26：<https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/download-swr-10614.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> 据克劳斯·米弗斯所言。

<sup>10</sup> 吴冠军，《拉康精神分析与中国思想之“纠葛”》。引自网页，2023.6.24：

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/lacanianchinesethought>

<sup>11</sup> 即将图像理解为自然能量的发散，而非描摹；一位成功的艺术家能够将这些能量“透过”作品，传递给观众。

重甚至爱的幸福环境。在经历了挣扎磨砺之后，他能够成功地回溯自我，而艺术便是他的通途。

艾墨思 Thomas Eller

## Friedrich Einhoff – Return to Self

Friedrich Einhoff has become quite well-known and successful also in China in recent years amongst artists, collectors, and scholars, which is a surprising and astonishing development. What is in the works of this prolific artist that resonates so well with Chinese audiences? And what is it that Chinese audiences see in him? – These might well be two separate issues altogether but witnessing the emotional responses in China towards Einhoff's works there must be a strong energy source hidden beneath the intricate surfaces of the artist's paintings – which is more than wonderful considering Einhoff never set foot into China.

But let's first start with beginnings. Friedrich Einhoff was born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1936, where his father Friedrich G. Einhoff was director of School for Artisans and Crafts. His father was also a well-connected and successful painter in a group of expressionist-realistic painters in the 1920s. He apparently was also a dominating figure who managed to keep his career focused during dark days in Germany and the family out of trouble at the same time. Einhoff junior by contrast was a sickly child often in medical care and frequently sent to different sanatoriums to treat his respiratory condition. He learned to enjoy these moments of solitude and isolation at a very early age, inspiring his artistic work for a whole lifetime. Hospital beds and medicinal baths abound in his paintings especially in a later phase of his life in which he was struggling with bouts of hearing loss. Also, his wife at the early age of 50 developed Alzheimer's disease and relied on his personal care. It was not an easy life. Yet he became a beloved teacher that left an indelible mark on the lives of many of his students, who describe him as very sensitive with an acute sense for their own sets of problems and not someone grooming disciples. In other words, Friedrich Einhoff was an empathic being who not only suffered his own strife but felt the struggle of others. He could be warm and even humorous, but also had to seclude himself at times from others and fell silent and withdrew.

As an artist he was as productive as he was prolific, leaving behind an oeuvre of thousands of works big or small, between which Einhoff apparently did not see much of a distinction. If anything, he seems to have preferred the intimacy of the small format and his quest was not for "the" masterpiece<sup>1</sup>, instead he would work on surfaces large and small with equal intensity and without preconceived goals. In a way the images had to make themselves using his body, mind, heart, and hands. His student Dirk Hoffmann describes many studio visits, where he encountered a very curated studio, with works hanging, leaning, lying purposefully, but everywhere. Einhoff also had a system of box archives, in which he kept certain works for later reassessment and potential re-working. He was organized, but also open-ended. Einhoff's work was and has always been a process in the true sense of the word. Working – for him meant to allow images to grow under his hands, adding layers over layers of traces. Those were traces of the brush, of collage and of whichever

---

<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Belinda Grace Gardner, he says this about the artist Ed Kienholz: "I have always liked this overwhelming effect that a work of art can have, and basically have always sought to bring it about myself. With the often rather quiet undertones I favor I'm not actually the type to induce this effect, but I'd very much like to trigger a certain irritation with my works."

tool or materials he chose, but also traces from outside his own making. There are numerous works based on worked over photographs he found in the media and on flea markets, bearing, quite literally, traces of the personae he chose to weave into his works. And it is this density of layering pictorial traces and existential ones that create the charge that electrifies his works.

It is this pictorial richness that first gets noticed by artists and connoisseurs in China, as I was told. There is lots to see and time to spend in unraveling the painterly quality that has been praised by none less than the eponymous art historian Werner Hofmann in his eulogy on Einhoff on the occasion of the award ceremony for the Hans Platschek-Prize for Art and Scripture<sup>2</sup> in 2009: “Einhoff has situated his art in the interspaces where the drawing merges with the painting (and vice versa), where an act of becoming prefigures an extinguishment, where the void that encloses the silhouette of a skull secretly contains within itself a satiation, where life appears to pupate into the rigor of death.”

This is the just the opening paragraph of the speech and it starts up many issues simultaneously. Firstly, and interestingly, the Chinese language does not differentiate between painting and drawing. This is a Western problem, however the genre-bending qualities of Einhoff’s works are duly noted. Secondly, the topics of “becoming” and “extinguishment” of course relate to the artist’s painterly process but are also quite obviously an allusion to Einhoff’s childhood. Not only was he a sick child, but he also grew up during WW2 – at a time when most men were serving in the army and the only ones visible during his childhood, were invalids having returned home. The young Friedrich adopted their appearance by walking on a cane himself to mimick their sense of damaged self, basically identifying himself with images of broken men.

This theme continues to reverberate in his artistic work until the very end, in fact even becoming more prominent over time. Severed limbs and seemingly “unattached” body parts play important roles in Einhoff’s pictorial universe. One painting in particular has been picked up upon by many writers – “Knie” (English: “knee”) from 2015. A shape entering the picture plane from the top left bends at the center of the image at an approximate angle of 100°. Its surface is scratched and appears as if moldy, dropping, what could be understood as the shin, straight down while slowly dissolving into the blackness of the backdrop – a very enigmatic image. It however shows that there is more to Friedrich Einhoff’s paintings than one would imagine at first. What is a knee? – one might ask at first. Here is the answer: “now let it be said that a knee basically always strides forwards. Every half meter bending inward and every other half meter straightening up (...). I myself have no principles, just the firm resolve to survive, to hurry, I have experiences not principle. (...) I am not the kneecap, and I am not the knee pit, I am not the lower leg, and I am not the thigh, they all perished, but the in-between.”<sup>3</sup> This is the knee of Lance Corporal Wieland speaking in the film “Die Patriotin”, 1979 by the famous German filmmaker

---

<sup>2</sup> The Platschek-Prize is given to artists that also have achievements in the field of literature, rendering Einhoff a sort of Literati-figure in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Kluge, Die Patriotin. Texte/Bilder 1-6, Frankfurt am Main. 1980, pp, 54-55 and 171



Alexander Kluge.<sup>4</sup> Which in turn is a re-reading of a poem by Christian Morgenstern from 1905.

### *Das Knie*

Ein Knie geht einsam durch die Welt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts!  
Es ist kein Baum! Es ist kein Zelt!  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.

Im Kriege ward einmal ein Mann  
erschossen um und um.  
Das Knie allein blieb unverletzt –  
als wär's ein Heiligtum.

Seitdem geht's einsam durch die Welt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.  
Es ist kein Baum, es ist kein Zelt.  
Es ist ein Knie, sonst nichts.<sup>5</sup>

Alexander Kluge quotes this poem by Morgenstern, the master of absurd literature, at the beginning of his feature length film from 1979. Friedrich Einhoff knew the poem independently and it has been re-printed in some of his books. But he also knew Alexander Kluge's film and the interpretation of the "knee" as a metaphor for the "in-between". Einhoff was an avid reader and, from 1961-66, had studied literature and philosophy. He very much admired writers like Thomas Bernhard, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and of course from an older generation, Christian Morgenstern. What connects this group of writers is a deep concern for the human condition and the strife of the people. Thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, or Martin Heidegger had influenced a whole generation of cultural workers, artists, and the film makers of la nouvelle vague and resonate deeply also in Einhoff's works.

---

<sup>4</sup> We are quoting this with gratitude towards Claus Mewes who discovered the references.

<sup>5</sup>

A lone knee wanders through the world,  
A knee and nothing more;  
It's not a tent, it's not a tree,  
A knee and nothing more.

In battle once there was a man  
Shot foully through and through;  
The knee alone remained unhurt  
As saints are said to do.

Since then it's wandered through the world,  
A knee and nothing more.  
It's not a tent, it's not a tree,  
A knee and nothing more.

This is the backdrop against which Einhoff developed his own ideas about art. Those very very existential times and Einhoff did not have a simple life. His wife fell ill when she was only in her 50s, slowly losing her mind and her memory. There is a very touching story about him visiting her in her nursing home when she had not been recognizing him anymore for a long time already. Einhoff had come straight from his artist studio one day, holding her hand. His wife was rather restless, until she pulled him closer and lifted his hand to her nose – when she smelled the paint on his fingers, she relaxed and smiled at him.<sup>6</sup>

Einhoff spent years over years visiting his wife on a daily basis taking care of her as best as he could. But he also took care of other people around him. Jaakov Blumas, one of Einhoff's student tells the story about a catalog he wanted to prepare of his own works, but did not have the money. Einhoff helped and asked nothing but one copy of the book for him to paint over. Once finished, Einhoff gave this book to one of his best friends Hans Weckerle, a prolific typographer and designer, as a present. Generosity thrice! – First, he helps finance a book, then he turns that into art, which he gives to a friend.

Everybody who knew him describes him like that, a person who would go out of his way to help others way beyond the call of duty. His students as well as his close friends are full of gratitude and love for him as a person and feel deep respect for him. Yet Einhoff also needed alone-time and would withdraw sometimes for longer periods and not answer phone calls. So, an image emerges of Einhoff being a warm and friendly, but also a very private and reserved person that commanded respect.

His sincere commitment to others, however, found an echo in a series of at least three exhibitions that another one of his best friends initiated. Thomas Rieck, a fellow artist, organized meetings at which artists would bring their own unfinished, unresolved, or otherwise unsatisfactory artworks. The artworks then were swapped within the group, so that one artist could „re-work“ a painting by another. He called the methodology „Überzeichnung“ in German which can mean two things. First it means to make a drawing on top of another image. „Über“ in German can also mean „super“ - so: super-drawing, a drawing so clear it is almost too clear. The resulting works were then exhibited under the title of „Trans“, in the sense of „across“ or „between“. Between two artists in this case. The interesting part is that this was not a dynamic to call into question the authorship of the artists, but an experiment in how two artists would be able to artistically meet and connect with one another.

This very much agrees with the personality of Einhoff, who always made an effort to emotionally connect with others. The „Überzeichnungen“ were an artistic expression of that personal desire. The works also highlights the gap, the in-between-space, the across that was mentioned before with regards to the very enigmatic painting of a knee. A knee as a metaphor for a place where things connect, but also allow for motion.

It might sound a bit contrived to say this, but the Chinese character „人“ looks a bit like a „knee“. The character „人“ shows two humans, because one cannot stand by

---

<sup>6</sup> Einhoff told this story to Claus Mewes.

himself. It is a bit like in the „Trans“-series, in which artworks need two artists in order to exist. Without forcing the argument too much, and because we are here talking about metaphors and not objects, we may be able to accept the structural similarities of the connection between two entities.

Without going too deep into the notions of individuality in the West, that traditionally has been focusing on the one person, like Descartes “cogito ergo sum” (I think therefore I am). If he hadn’t been such an artist, Einhoff might have been saying: “I relate therefore I exist.”

Change in Western thinking came from different beginnings. Just to name two example: It was Emmanuel Lévinas famously said: “Before I was, somebody was there before me and gave me a name.”<sup>7</sup> Born in 1906, he survived the war in a prison camp, when his whole family was killed by the Nazis. He put forward an “ethics of the other” as a reaction to his suffering. The other one was Hans-Georg Gadamer, born in 1900: “Educated is he who can overcome his self-love so that he hears what the other wants to say.” His opus magnum “Wahrheit und Methode” (truth and method) holds it that truth is something that emerges as an act of recognition in a dialog: “Understanding oneself in the world, as I said, is actually the issue. And that means understanding each other. And understanding each other means understanding the understanding of the other. And that is morally, not logically, the most difficult human task of all. We must learn to see that the Other is a primary limit of our self-love and self-centeredness.”<sup>8</sup> In other words – to arrive at “oneself” one has to go through a deep understanding of the other in order to return to (one-)self.

We know that Friedrich Einhoff was very well read and intellectually curious, but it could not be established, if he was really familiar with both philosophers. He did read Jacques Lacan<sup>9</sup>, the preeminent French psychoanalyst who was convinced, that humans do not pre-exist their interactions. In fact, “individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating with others”. In a video conference for the Freud Museum London, Prof. Wu Guanjun talks about Lacan’s effort to learn Chinese in order to support his deconstruction of the self in search of the unconscious via the structure of the Chinese language.<sup>10</sup>

Could it be that some of that Asian knowledge made its way to Germany to Friedrich Einhoff? – quite obviously there seem to be some common traits and also some interesting and productive misunderstandings. Nothing can be confirmed for sure. What can be said though is that Einhoff’s friend Thomas Rieck was very much

---

<sup>7</sup> Mathias Schreiber says this about Emmanuel Lévinas: “Man is a crazy animal, capable of thought processes like this: The other is there before me and therefore more important than me. I see that he looks at me, and he also sees me in this way. In his "countenance" there is an infinite strangeness, from which "the whole humanity" looks at me and says: "You will not commit murder." The "trace of the infinite" in the sight of the other makes this infinitely precious for me. This forces me into a strict "responsibility" for him.”  
citation from the web on June 27, 2023: <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/der-blick-des-anderen-a-26b5919f-0002-0001-0000-000045424924>

<sup>8</sup> SWR2 Wissen: Günter Bachmann, „Hans-Georg Gadamer - Philosophie des Verstehens“. Citation from the web on June 26, 2023: <https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/download-sw-10614.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> According to Claus Mewes

<sup>10</sup>Wu Guanjun, “The ‘Entanglement’ Between Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Chinese Thought“, Citation from the web on June 24, 2023: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/lacanianchinesethought>

interested in Asian cultures and traveled to India frequently. It was he who introduced the idea of “trans” – which became an “across” and “in-between” in Einhoff’s work – the empty space between two people, between “you” and “me”. The longer one looks at Einhoff’s portrait, they change. When at first glance the figures seem to be self-contained, stuck within themselves, over time one realizes their inner energy as an offer to connect with them and sometimes even identify with them. Most of them possess the transformative power to engage with the viewer on a very direct emotional level.

In that sense the works by Einhoff are not “about” anything. They don’t show or explain or narrate. They are. They convey inner energies put into them by the painter. And it is this particular quality that makes them similar to a Chinese notion of art<sup>11</sup>. As an artist he very often felt the need to seclude himself or just surround himself with kindred spirits. Almost like in the history of the Seven Sages in the Bamboo Grove, Einhoff sometimes preferred to work in obscurity and far away from centers of power. When Chinese art traditionally concerns itself with the forces of nature in a Daoist approach, Einhoff focusses on human nature and as mentioned before, he was sort of a Literati-figure German style, well versed in literature and philosophy, for which he was awarded the Hans-Platschek-Prize for Art and Scripture in 2009. Even his aesthetic of a drastically reduced chromatic scale, but rich in shades of black, is similar to that of a Chinese ink-wash-tradition. Why that is, why Einhoff became this exceptional figure who can communicate seemingly effortlessly across cultural borders, might never become completely resolved. What can be said about him though, is that he was able to re-integrate the pieces of his complicated life of pain and sorrows into one of achievement and humble strength. He was able to transform his immediate social life into a blissful environment of care, respect and even love. After all his strife he could successfully return to self for which his art was his conduit.

Thomas Eller

---

<sup>11</sup> The notion would be to understand images not as depictions but as emanations of natural energies and a successful artist is one who is able to channel these energies “across” (via) the artwork to the viewer.