

Harald Naegeli — The Known Unknown

An Exhibition in Three Parts Part I: Landscapes and Animals

Born in 1939 in Zurich, Harald Naegeli was known as the *Sprayer of Zurich* in the late '70s. For political reasons, he had distanced himself from his hometown for more than three decades. Now, he returned from Düsseldorf (Germany) — and with him came his drawings. These drawings were hardly ever seen in Zurich, let alone exhibited publicly as a comprehensive retrospective. Therefore, it is not surprising that only a few insiders know that the notorious *Sprayer of Zurich* did not limit himself to urban space. Being the silent, reserved and inconspicuous artist that he is, he created an impressive oeuvre of drawings over the years. This oeuvre is at the heart of this exhibit. To provide an extensive representation, the Musée Visionnaire presents it in three stages, each focusing on different themes. The start of the exhibitions will be announced on the homepage and in the newsletter.

Landscapes and animals

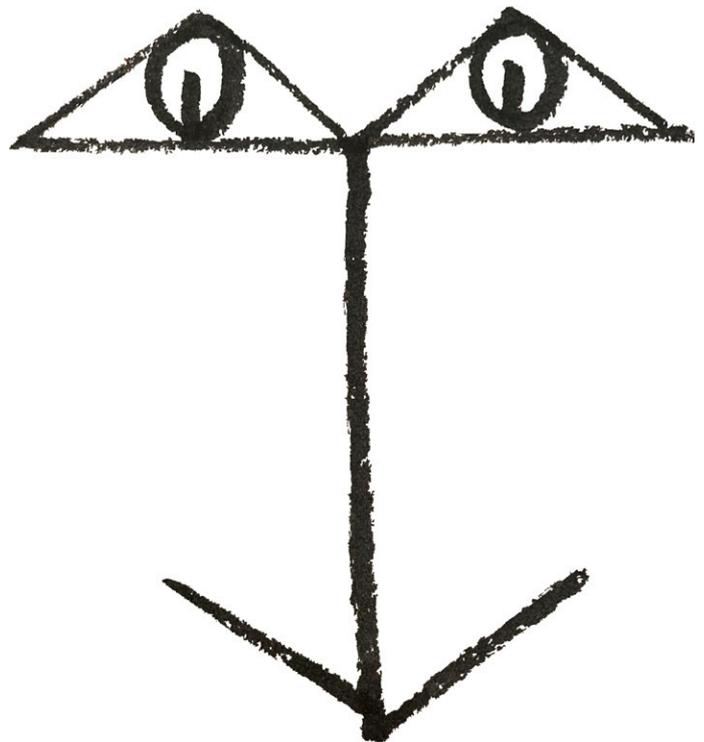
Landscapes and animal images mark the start of the three-part exhibition. This is not by chance; Harald Naegeli is a great lover of nature. He has organized many charity campaigns for animal protection and nature conservation organizations, and the prize money that he received in 2020 as an art award from the City of Zurich was donated in full to organizations committed to the protection of nature and animals. Harald Naegeli is not only concerned about nature, nature is also his most important teacher and an inexhaustible source of inspiration for his artistic work. The fine drawings in the exhibition, the “Small Landscapes”, the “Large Landscapes”, the “Lightning Bolts” and the animal drawings, bear witness to this. However, anyone who expects to find naturalistic images will be disappointed. Naegeli does not depict, but internalizes the laws of nature through tireless study and intensive observation. Sketchbooks have been his loyal companions for many years. He has already filled hundreds, some of which can be seen in the exhibition.

Naegeli's studies of nature show his approach. Often, inconspicuous everyday phenomena draw his attention: a tuft of grass trembling in the wind becomes a primeval forest; a flock of birds whose natural dynamics he takes as a model and who, through his hand on paper, turn into an illusion of movement. As Naegeli himself says, the creation of movement in the inherently static medium of drawing is one of his major concerns.

Therefore, he avoids closed forms and instead draws “lines that do not form closed forms, but run somewhere, begin and end somewhere” (Naegeli). This process can be traced particularly well in the two “Great Landscapes” in the exhibition. At first sight, it doesn't seem easy to recognize mountains, valleys,

rivers, meadows and everything else that one usually associates with landscapes. In Naegeli's “Great Landscapes”, the lines and points of black ink seem to be set arbitrarily. The gaze does not identify any object at first sight. Only when you take a closer look, if you take your time and get involved with the large-format sheets, do the landscape elements eventually emerge. Here, a group of trees seems to support a slope, there a river runs through and elsewhere a pleasant spot invites you to take a deep breath. Dynamism and calm alternate and create tension. Naegeli's landscapes cannot be determined topographically. Instead, the open structures in the drawings refer to the essence of nature itself, its versatility, beauty, harmony, geometry, rhythm, sensitivity, poetry and power.

The same is true for his animal studies. Harald Naegeli, who took courses in scientific drawing at the Zurich School of Applied Arts in his youth, approaches the animal bodies with close observation, then transfers their contours onto paper, and superimposes these contours several times until the various lines present the unmistakable dynamics of a few animal species. This certainty of the lines, gained via perception of nature, is what characterizes Naegeli's work — whether he works with a can, a pencil or a brush.



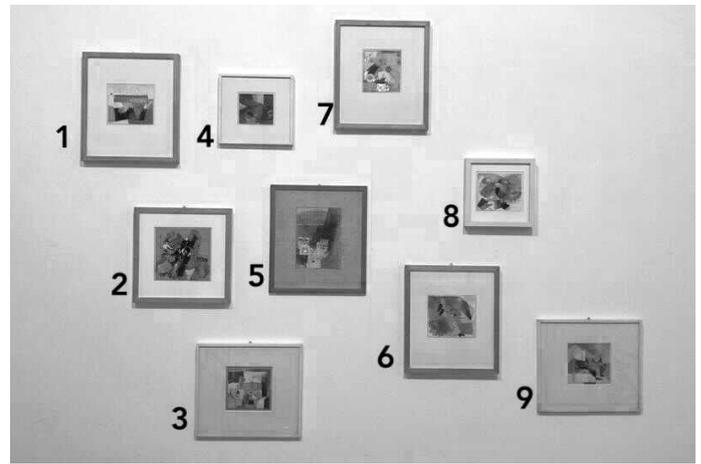
Collages

Collages supplement the landscapes and animal drawings in the first part of the exhibition. The early collages (1956–1968) bear witness to Naegeli's muses, among them Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters and the Dadaist movement in general. Naegeli would push found objects back and forth on a cardboard pad — dried flower petals, matches, shredded letters, scraps of fabric, old wallpaper or carefully cut pieces of paper — until he was convinced that he had created visual balance. The results are poetic metaphors in which everyday materials that are worthless are given a new aesthetic and trigger associations. Towards the end of the 1960s, Naegeli broke away from his earlier artistic models. Instead of everyday materials, he started to use black adhesive strips for his collages. The line moves into the center of his practice, empty space becomes an important design element, and the collages that he now calls "Absolute Collages", start to increasingly resemble calligraphy sheets, prefiguring Naegeli's style of the later graffiti figures.

Digital platform

Parallel with the exhibition, the Musée Visionnaire is developing a digital platform where the works that Naegeli created in public space can be documented and discussed (including those that no longer exist). Over time and with the help of the public, a virtual museum will emerge that preserves cultural heritage and connects people.

Please follow the footsteps of the Sprayer of Zurich and share your photos on www.sprayervonzürich.com.



Legend for the Collages

1 Mädchengeschichten, 1968

(Girls' Stories)

Collage on cardboard: fabric, paper, gouache, petal, sand, wood shavings

2 Collagenimpulse, 1968

(Collage Impetus)

Collage on cardboard: various papers, fabrics, string

3 TO-Bild, 1966

(TO-Picture)

Collage on cardboard: stamp, sandpaper, newsprint, pencil, colored pencil

4 Untitled, 1966

Collage on cardboard: jute cloth, cotton cloth, paper, granules

5 Verfallendes Gold, 1968

(Decaying Gold)

Collage on cardboard: paper, matchbox, paper from champagne bottle, fabrics, jute, pencil shavings

6 Improvisation, 1968

Collage on cardboard: various papers, matchstick, petal, jute cloth, pencil shavings

7 Sehr innig, 1967

(Very Intimate)

Collage on cardboard: various papers and fabrics, feather, leaf, matchbox, candle paper

8 Untitled, 1968

Collage on cardboard: various papers, jute cloth, cardboard, petal, sand

9 Collage mit Goethes Schriftzügen, 1967

(Collage with Goethe's Writings)

Collage on cardboard: various papers and fabrics

Biography

1939

Born on December 4, 1939 in Zurich.

1956–60

Studies at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts with Karl Schmid, who was Hans Arp's wood engraver at the time. Creates first collages.

1964

Studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He does not attend classes, but studies the Old Masters in the Cabinet des Dessins (drawings) of the Louvre, including works by Antonio Pisanello and Constantin Guys.

1965

Returns to Zurich, where he again devotes himself to collages.

1970

Sojourn in India.

1977

First graffiti are created in Ticino, then in Zurich.

1979

Bounty of 3,000 CHF is put on the head of the "Sprayer of Zurich". Arrested in June.

1980

Expansion of spray actions, including Cologne with "Kölner Totentanz" (Cologne Dance of Death), Berlin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt and Stuttgart.

1982

Cologne Art Association shows a photo documentation of the "Kölner Totentanz" and an international arrest warrant is issued.

1984

Harald Naegeli voluntarily surrenders to Basel border guards with Klaus Staeck and Joseph Beuys. Serves six months in prison. After his release, Naegeli leaves Switzerland for political reasons.

1986

Harald Naegeli reacts to the Sandoz chemical spill in Schweizerhalle with the "Totentanz der Fische" (Dance of Death of the Fish) along the Rhine.

1987

Graffiti campaigns in Venice against animal testing and pollution by cruise ships.

1990

Exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf and the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Harald Naegeli devotes himself increasingly to works on paper. Beginning of the "Urwolke" (Primordial Cloud).

1993

Exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zurich with spray performance.

2004

Restoration of the "Undine" (1978) at the University of Zurich and beginning of correspondence with the Grossmünster regarding the Totentanz (Dance of Death) project proposal in the towers.

2010

Charity campaign in favor of ProNatura in the gallery Kunst im West, Zurich as well as an exhibition in the Cologne Zoo for animal protection.

2014

Exhibition at the European Academy of Art in Trier.

2016

Exhibition "Der Prozess" (The Process) at the Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf.

2017

Harald Naegeli donates to the Graphische Sammlung Tübingen, Bonn, the Schnütgen Museum Cologne and the Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf.

2018

"Dance of Death" in the Grossmünster begins, but its completion is forbidden by the government council.

2019

Harald Naegeli leaves Düsseldorf and returns to Zurich.

2020

Action "Wolkegabe" (Cloud Gift): Harald Naegeli gives away 50 original drawings to building owners who waive the rent for commercial tenants during the Corona Lockdown. Awarded the Art Prize of the City of Zurich.



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Items on loan from Harald Naegeli

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