

MARIANA CASTILLO DEBALL
 Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany

The I, like its homophonic sibling, the eye, is the centre of the universe. But the I, forged as it is in the recesses of the mind, remains inextricably bound to its fleshy vessel. In Didier Anzieu's *The Skin-Ego* (1985), the Lacanian psychoanalyst proposes that, in infancy, the workings of the ego are practised on the skin. It is in relation to our own derma that we formulate a self that will later interact with multifarious selves. Thus, for Anzieu: 'All thoughts are thoughts of the body.' Thus, for James Joyce: 'One might say of modern man that he has an epidermis rather than a soul.'

For her exhibition 'das Haut-Ich' (The Skin-Ego), Mariana Castillo Deball intertwines Anzieu's proposition with the logic of the first known Mesoamerican calendar, the *tonalpohualli*. Dating from 6 BCE, the *tonalpohualli* is a 260-day calendar comprising two dials: the first, numerical, runs for 20 days; the second, etched with prophetic deities (house, lizard, snake, death), elapses after 13. The mismatched dials run in synchronicity, meaning each numerical day aligns with a different demiurge until the 260-day mark, at which point it reboots: day 1, crocodile, fertility god.

Central to each proposition is a belief that the physical corpus is inextricably predicated on an organizational schema, one omnipresent yet unseen. Castillo Deball visualizes this on numerous levels. On the floor of Barbara Wien's first room is a series of interlocking, interchangeable pink watercolours (all works 2018) on white diamond floor tiles. Each is numbered and titled *Tecpatl*, the Nahuatl word for a sacrificial knife. In a second space lies a further set of rhombi, arranged into orthogonal cubes at progressive stages of completion. Castillo Deball's interconnecting shapes are pointedly irregular and, consequently, can only tessellate to a certain degree: their sides sit flush; further additions are rendered impossible. Like the scripted alignments of the *tonalpohualli*, they are limited; like us, they are destined to assume the same configurations until (house, lizard, snake) death do us part.

On the gallery walls, a series of vast interlocking aluminium girders, finished in primary colours, ape Meccano strips. Perforated and latched with wooden pins, the girders, like the tiles, appear functional but, once again, are restricted. Rigid, they strain as they navigate a doorframe or a tight corner; fixed within form and function, they falter as they

attempt to map the real world. These linked forms resurface in a series of watercolours that resemble blueprints for future constructions, geometric ponderings or the lingering footprints of a wanderer. While in *Tonalamatl IV* and *Tonalamatl V* these maps are unadorned, in *Tonalamatl III* Mesoamerican deities linger at each corner – a silent syndicate of *tonalpohualli* cartographers dictating each seemingly instinctive step.

Why lay a mesh of logic upon life's arbitrary happenings? Why crave method within mania? For safety. If we forego autonomy and submit to a predetermined narrative, we have licence to fail. But while such systems preach freedom to move, to think, they remain systems and are thus restrictive. The two theories that breathe through 'das Haut-Ich' are brothers, in that they both consider the body's progression through its temporary habitat. But, like all brothers, they war. In Anzieu's domain, the world revolves around a self-governing I; in that of the *tonalpohualli*, the I moves in accordance with the world. In 'das Haut-Ich', we find something more akin to reality: an irresolute presence seized by both a thirst for autonomy and a hunger for reason. It is neither static nor controlled, as it is inhuman to be.

Harry Thorne

This page

Mariana Castillo Deball, *Scorpion Time II*, 2018, watercolour and ink on paper, 35 x 22 cm

Opposite page

Above

Paul Klee, *Metamorphosen: Der Zusammenbruch der biblischen Schlange* (Metamorphoses: The Collapse of the Biblical Serpent), 1940, coloured pastel on paper on cardboard, 34 x 49 cm

Below

James Richards, *Phrasing*, 2018, installation view

