

Artillery Gallery Rounds
October 13, 2022

Arno Beck
Zen Them To Hell
Nino Mier Gallery
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by Jody Zellen



Despite being mired in digital culture, the Bonn based artist Arno Beck makes analogue works. In his exhibition “Zen Them to Hell”, he presents typewritten landscape drawings. Each of the eighteen identically sized and shaped, framed works on paper juxtapose cartoon-like clouds, similar to the ones found in early computer games like the 8-bit Super Mario Brothers (also used by Cory Arcangel in his seminal 2002 work, *Super Mario Clouds*) with pixelated mountain peaks and landscapes usually associated with 18th-19th century paintings of the sublime. At 20 x 20 inches, they are larger than the size of a traditional carriage on a typewriter, and therefore beg the question, “how were they made?”

A video from the artist’s Instagram shows him aggressively typing away on a modified typewriter that holds large-scale pieces of paper. The works are created by tapping specific keys (plus signs, periods, colons and the space bar) over and over again as the paper moves across the carriage, developing the composition gradually along the way. Beck at times interrupts the flow, overtyping certain areas to achieve the necessary texture and darkness that coincide with the landscape to be represented. The process is physically taxing and time consuming. He ignores any errors that occur. From close-up, the works are grids of lines and dots and spaces that coalesce into an image from afar. Though made by hand (and not on a computer) the source images are found online and transferred to the typewritten medium. They also resemble plotter prints from the early days of computer art.

It is not a leap to equate the typed marks with pixels. As Beck has remarked, “The analog production process breaks and livens up the grid, which functions as a structuring system.” He is interested in the relationship between the digital and the analogue, and in his previous bodies of work, he has created paintings based on computer generated imagery. Reproducing low resolution computer graphics found in games, he meticulously recreated them by hand, focusing on the pixelated lines and jagged edges of the original graphics. While these landscapes could easily be rendered by a computer program or even as ASCII images, the wonder of the work is his process. As he says, “With my approach, I humanize technology, welcoming the glitches of the handmade – and the error is part of the beauty.”

While there are subtle variations in the typewriter drawings on view, they have similar

compositions— a field or meadow leading to a row of trees or a jagged mountain peak rising into a sky which is comprised of rows of evenly spaced dots interrupted by billowing white clouds (areas without type) and outlined by a more concentrated presence of marks. Across the series, the number and placement of clouds change as does the shape and height of the peak as, in essence, Beck uses the same process to create each work. His methodology is in line with other 'post-internet' artists whose works examine the effects of the internet and digitally derived culture without necessarily using traditional digital tools. Beck's conceptual works focus on the ways photorealistic landscapes can meld with kitschy clouds to create an analogue production of digital imagery.

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