' Since all the tools for my untying
In four-dimensional space are lying,
Where playful fancy intersperses,
Whole avenues of universes…'

– James Clerk Maxwell, *Paradoxical Ode* (1878)

Human perceptions of the world have long been riddled with uncertainty. With the advent of modern science, our senses were proven to create distorted visions of the external environment; the world was not flat but round, and time, not constant but relative. It was as if our senses had been 'lying', limiting our knowledge of the world through their selective filters. In the present, skepticism of the ability of sensorial judgment to convey the actual nature of things finds expression in existential and phenomenological philosophy, which considers reality as nothing more than our perception of it.[1] Yet for others, this gap — between that which is sensed and that which is, or could be — invites the possibility of alternative realities; whether physical dimensions or higher levels of human consciousness.

Janaina Tschäpe's art readily explores this juncture between perception and understanding. Her paintings, drawings, photography, video and sculptures prevaricate between representations, allusions and abstractions of landscapes, in which it is difficult to discern a palpable reality. This tendency reflects Tschäpe's belief in landscapes as memories; ethereal, ephemeral things composed of recollections of places that we have previously seen or been to. The vivid juxtapositions of colour in her paintings in particular also seem to express how emotions affect our perception of landscapes. In *Floresta da Mina* (2006), hues of red, orange and blue infuse ambiguous images of flora and aqueous substances, creating a vista that is as menacing as it is meditative. As in most of her paintings, *Floresta da Mina* has no discernible horizon, top or bottom, all life seeming to sprout from within the canvas.

One could consider the landscape as the original *trompe l'oeil*, which, when subject to certain climatic conditions, can create potent impressions. One example would be the rainbows that are created through unique combinations of sunlight and rain; although we can see them, they are essentially mirages. In *Eclipse* (2008), Tschäpe enacts one of nature's most enigmatic phenomena, recording the movement of a balloon as it obscures a view of the moon at night. The lightweight balloon highlights the fleeting and illusory nature of lunar eclipses, as it trembles and struggles to maintain its position. The work brings to mind the historic associations of the eclipse with mystery and the divine: in ancient Mayan society, for instance, the solar eclipse was interpreted as a sign of communication from the gods.[2] But while science has enabled us to understand the causes behind such natural phenomena, it has not stopped us from speculating over their meaning. Filmed during the artist's voyage along the Amazon River, *The Ghost in Between* (2013) [p.108-113] references the spirits still believed by local tribes to inhabit reflections in the water of the River. The River's uniquely opaque colour, which derives from the peat made from leaves that fall into its waters from the surrounding rainforest, generates these striking, phantom-like reflections. The two-channel video of *The Ghost in Between* doubles this effect of mirroring, and in many shots the reflections appear so lucid that they could be mistaken for the actual rainforest.

Tschäpe's own versions of otherworldly creatures appear as if they could be from another dimension — despite, as Rachael Thomas has observed, their 'obvious fabrications'.[3] Although the costumes and attachments used to create them (inflated balloons, latex, tubing) are explicit, they still feel intangible; an effect created by the artist's selective framing and blurring through the camera lens. Incorporating elements of aquatic, plant and human life, these creatures also reveal her interest in and connection with the sea and its various 'hidden' dimensions (her own name, Janaina, refers to *Iemanjá*, the Brazilian sea goddess). In folklore, creatures borne from the sea are often associated with feelings of deception and seduction, revealing how humans use their mythology to cope with the sea's unknown. For many of us, the depth of the ocean is an incommensurable abyss; we may be able to measure it but we cannot quite fathom it. Tschäpe draws on this unchartered space to imagine not only 'undiscovered' hybrid forms but more fluid dimensions of time and space. Many of her landscapes could be seen as seascapes, their free-floating forms portraying a world where time feels slower and space altogether larger.

It is interesting, therefore, that some of Tschäpe's recent works appear to 'flatten' the landscape through geometrical forms. In contrast with her earlier paintings that created a sense of depth through seamlessly woven shapes and layers, works like *Untitled Painting VI* (2013) [p.30-31] divide the landscape into distinct planes. The reduced forms and block colours in *Deepe and Edeep* (2012) recall Brazilian Concrete and Neo-Concrete art and its emphasis on line, plane, colour and negative space. Whereas Tschäpe's earlier works enact a 'loss' of landscape through the dispersal of colour and form, these works seem to 'find' it again, training organic matter into simplified structures. Many of their titles — *Geometrida, Polymnia* — also suggest a more analytical and detached interpretation of the landscape, as if she were trying to step away from it. Although a certain detachment from her subject matter has always been a part of her method of painting (almost all her works are made in

[1] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) (Yale University Press, 2007) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) (Routledge, 2002)
[2] See Heather McKillop, *The Ancient Maya: New Perspectives* (New York: Norton, 2004)
[3] 'Janaina Tschäpe in conversation with Rachael Thomas' in *Chimera* (The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2008), p. 103

Breaking Solids (2013)

the studio), recently it has pushed her works to the point where they no longer specifically allude to landscapes.

However, these different views of landscape are not as contradictory as they might seem. In fact, her recent planar perspectives actually deepen our understanding of the landscape's multi-dimensional character because they demonstrate how we first see and comprehend spatial depth. The problem with complex theories of multiple dimensions is that they require leaps of the imagination beyond human grasp. If one were to apply this notion to what we can grasp it starts to make sense: how, for example, would you explain three-dimensional space to someone who could only see in two-dimensions? Theologian Edwin A. Abbott first posed this question in his novel *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), which recounts the story of a character (A Square) who is only capable of perceiving the world in two dimensions. A Square's world is overturned when he meets the Sphere, who attempts to explain the concept of three-dimensional space. While the Sphere's efforts to encourage A Square to imagine a cube fail, his analogy of the cube as a series of perpendicular lines succeeds. Abbott's suggestion is that visual understanding comes from what we already know and can perceive.

Tschäpe's *Cutouts* (2012-present) originate from a similar attempt to explain the concept of three-dimensional space to her daughter. By working with paper — a flat surface — and transforming it into sculptures that retain their original form, she illustrates how a two-dimensional surface can be thought about in terms of sculpture. Her cutouts are surprisingly free, their swirls of paper intertwining and cascading into space with a complexity that belies the simplicity of their construction. Part of Tschäpe's own fascination with these sculptures lies in their paradoxically robust quality; the paper is less fragile than it appears to be, and the sculptures can be folded back into their original templates.[4] The cutouts themselves demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between two and three-dimensional form, in which one is nearly always perceived in relation to the other. The flattening and overpainting of cutouts in her monoprint works like *Breaking Solids* [p.65] and *Lineland* (2013), for instance, comes across as so brutal that the viewer is almost prompted to mourn their loss of three-dimensional form.

For Tschäpe, this current stripping back of her works is necessary in order to understand how she navigates surfaces and creates a sense of depth within them. In her drawings, this process nearly always begins with an exploration of line, a line that can express a multitude of dimensional possibilities. For, when seen from a distance, does not everything become a dot or a line? In *Flatland*, Edwin A. Abbott writes:

> 'The far-off land may have bays, forelands, angles in and out to any number and any extent, yet at a distance you see none of these…nothing but a grey unbroken line on the water.'[5]

Lines are thus not only means of demarcating space but metaphors for the boundlessness of space. In drawings seen in Tschäpe's most recent sketchbook, lines swirl across the page, evoking macro, micro, real and imagined forms that never quite coalesce. They seem less like her *Possible Plants* (2008) and more like 'possibles', creating a sense of depth not by adding layers but by subtracting them. These drawings also seem more intuitive and spontaneous than some of her previous ones, as if they were traces of impulses that had somehow managed to by-pass cognitive processing.

Yet such processing does take place. Tschäpe describes her process of making these drawings as one in which she reacts to forms and ideas that start to manifest within them. A tension thus emerges between control and intellect on the one side, and abandon and intuition on the other. In *Ancula Stichopus* [p.54-55] and *Spiny Muricea* (2014), shards of swirling matter are pulled into orbit by an ineffable, centrifugal force, as if they had been physically wrestled into place. These corporeal references in Tschäpe's drawings are not coincidental, stemming from the long periods that she spends with her works in the studio before completing them. In this sense, body, gesture and movement become integral to her works' understandings of dimension and form. In her earlier video and photography, such as *A Botanist's Dream* (2006), she experimented with different modes of positioning the body within the landscape, confusing their normal senses of scale. Her video *After the Rain* (2003) inspired choreographers Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner to create *Borbulho* (2009), a dance about metamorphosis for which Tschäpe was invited to make the costumes and set design. Performed in real-time and space, it enabled Tschäpe to consider how these two elements could further influence the perception of landscape in her own art.

Conjunctions of time, space and movement can create extreme forms of perception. The works of Brion Gysin — whose calligraphic graffiti resembles many of Tschäpe's recent drawings — often allude to the importance of running movement both in their creation and perception.[6] The surrealist filmmaker Maya Deren — a key influence on Tschäpe's practice — was also inspired by the power of ritualistic movements to enable alternative modes of seeing and perceiving. As a result, her works often evoke the sensation of being in a hypnotic trance.[7] Tschäpe's painting *Dance with the Witches* (2013) [p.160-161] portrays and performs a similar kind of hypnotic 'dance', entrancing the eyes of the viewer via chaotic swirls of tenebrous forms. Beyond its symbolism, the work becomes a kind of visual sorcery, psychologically transporting us to another realm.

In a way, each of Tschäpe's works acts as a portal to another. Connected in series, they often elaborate forms and concepts begun in earlier works. Her *Photodrawings* (2010) consist of documentation from previous performances re-photographed with a pinhole camera, which she then altered and drew over in order to give them 'another dimension.'[8] By working in series and across different media, she disperses our view of the landscape between them, underlining the latter's multiple perspectives and positions. While the paper cutouts from *The Ocean Within* (2013) [p.94-95] evoke tumbling waves, the video allows us to experience the same sensation in time and space through footage of the inside and outside of a balloon bobbing in the ocean. She describes her recent series of paper sculptures, such as *Dodecahedron II* and *Octahedron I* (2014), as literally 'rotating paintings', which, when looked at from afar, almost appear flat.[9] It is only when placed against a two-dimensional surface or on top of one another that they spring back to three-dimensional life. In their multiple transformations, interconnections and reflections, Tschäpe's various evocations of landscapes enable us to enjoy the very act of perceiving — not as deception but as constant revelation. To quote James Clerk Maxwell, they become places 'Where playful fancy intersperses / Whole avenues of universes…'

Janaina Tschäpe's sketchbook
賈奈娜 · 查普的寫生本

Dodecahedron II (2014)

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[4] Conversation with the artist, 7 February 2014
[5] Edwin A. Abbott, Flatland: *A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) (New Haven: Tantor, 2010)
[6] Ed. Laura Hoptman, *Brion Gysin: Dream Machine* (New Museum, 2010), p.60-63
[7] Deren was particularly inspired by the notion of transcendence in Vodou culture and rites in Haiti, where she periodically lived and worked. See Mark Alice Durant, 'A Life Choreographed for Camera' in *Aperture*, No. 195, Summer 2009, p. 8.

[8] Conversation with the artist, 7 February 2014
[9] Conversation with the artist, 7 February 2014