



THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

Although they reference mathematics, biochemistry, technology and graffiti, Wolfgang Herbold's images are in a world of their own

YOU have to acknowledge an aesthetic debt to science: where would street style be without Levi's Twisted jeans, or student walls without MC Escher, not to mention that the entire design team at Diesel would be out of a job. Scientific research produces incredible, hyper-real images almost as a sideline, and provokes a slew of artists and designers to add their own elements to the equation. Early last century, D'Arcy Thompson maintained in *On Growth and Form* that all learning, art or science, essentially asks the same question, and that all biological phenomena can be reduced to mathematical formulae. It's an enduring idea, and very nice that we all know what a dust mite looks like, but some people think those images could now do with a bit of a shake-up. And that's where Wolfgang Herbold comes in.

The Cologne-born Herbold makes pictures which straddle a point between electron-microscope imagery, which references mathematics and biochemistry and combines clever-clever, digital jiggery-pokery into abstract visual diaries. They end up looking as though a street tagger and a maths textbook came a-cropper with a paper shredder. Referencing maths, biochemistry and technology, Herbold's pictures dispense with order in favour of frenetic, shiny slabs of plastic-composite graffiti.

'They are the opposite of photography, experiments in what you can do taking a real image as a starting point, then digitally processing it,' says the 34-year-old. 'They are abstract in a way, but they also reference technical-scientific expressions, diagrams and mechanical inventions.'

'They allow associations and can be transferred into other fields. Ultimately they serve purely aesthetic criteria,' he explains. Maybe that's not quite true; these aren't step-by-step illustrations, DNA snapshots or purely decorative pictures. 'Ultimately their origins come from a general interest in the aesthetic values of scientific images, especially the kind produced by electron microscopes.' And Herbold's pictures are a kind of visual experiment, trying to set up something in opposition to the 'truth' of photography, or the 'truth' of science.

'I guess what I'm questioning is the amount of truth that can be contained in a scientific representation, something which is usually taken to be fact,' he concludes. His pictures in a sense fake an alternative reality, or at least purport to presenting the science of an alternative reality, even though the result may be in his own words largely incidental. Is this what they mean by the appliance of science? KAREN CHUNG

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