

Under Water (2020-2021)

Hans-Christian Schink: *Unter Wasser*, Stuttgart 2022.

About twelve thousand years ago, when the glaciers of the last ice age began to melt, the Pleistocene, which had begun two and a half million years earlier, came to an end. The global rise in temperature marked the beginning of a new epoch in the earth's history: the Holocene. Due to the change in climate, the ice sheets that extended from the Arctic and covered a good portion of the European continent gradually receded, leaving behind a landscape dotted with numerous bodies of water in the area that is now northeastern Germany.

This landscape, with typical glacial surface features including ground moraines, end moraines, outwash plains, and glacial valleys, is the region with the most extensive water surface in Germany. The topography is characterized by twenty-six thousand kilometers of rivers and streams, and over 2,200 lakes. Most of the lakes were formed in the depressions caused by the glaciers or in the gullies eroded by meltwater. In addition to these bodies of water, thousands of kettle holes are the most apparent mark left by the ice age in this landscape.

When the glaciers melted, they left behind enormous amounts of sediment, consisting of debris and rubble contained in the ice. The sediment often contained large blocks of ice, ranging from a few meters to hundreds of meters. Due to the insulating properties of the surrounding stone material, the melting process of these blocks of ice, known as "dead ice," could take thousands of years. In the process, the debris contained in the ice sank deeper and formed dense depressions, creating mostly round bodies of water surrounded by reeds and shrubs.

Northeastern Germany, one of the most thinly populated areas of the country, is also the most agriculturally developed. Nevertheless, the hydrological balance of the fertile land had to be regulated in many places in order to make it usable. Drainage measures for producing peat have been in effect since the sixteenth century; systematically planned land-improvement methods peaked in the GDR period. Although extensive renaturation measures were introduced after 1990, an extensive system of drainage gullies still extends over nearly one third of the agricultural area, forming an independent water structure.

These bodies of water are home to the animals and plants that have adapted to the individual environments; they continue to be subjected to various influences, especially caused by human settlements and agriculture. During the phase of political upheaval in 1989–90 it was possible to establish large areas of protected natural landscapes. Since then, there have been constant efforts to retain the biodiversity of these areas. Nevertheless, the industrialization of agriculture continues to progress. In addition to this, seasonal and climatic fluctuations in both water level and water temperature have increased. The effects of human civilization are thus the greatest risk factor in the survival of these biotopes.

The photographs were taken in the waters of the Mecklenburg Lake District in 2020 and 2021. An underwater camera was used, but not by way of the standard diving procedure. I've worked according to the principle of "controlled chance," that is, the camera was held in the water in places that seem appropriate when viewed from above, but it was impossible to monitor the resulting image in the viewfinder. Some of the photographs were realized in shallow shoreline areas or ditches, while floating rafts were used to take shots in deeper waters.