

JACKY STRENZ

Galerie

MARKUS EBNER

My studio spends its holidays on a conceptual art resort from the early eighties,
remembering an old work of mine in Herzogspitalstrasse

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Prior to the Olympic Games in 1972 Günter Fruhtrunk realized an 'art-in-architecture-project' at Herzogspitalstraße in Munich that equally served as a vent shaft of the car garage beneath. The title of Markus Ebner show refers to this work.

Given the unabated allure of painting, these days the question arises as to the further development of concrete art in the age of mandatory cheerfulness, called postmodernism, which is said to have kicked off in those “early eighties”.

In order to advance this rigorous approach of the 1970s into an era that would acknowledge all categories and judgements with a benevolent smile, safely putting them in quotation marks, Markus Ebner's opening paragraph sends the utterly serious concept art off to the holiday camp of a generation who generally did away with seriousness. In this “Club Med(iumspecificity) even the tautology contained in the title ceases to be one. From conceptual art's point of view painting was once the epitome of everything formalistic, commercial and whatever scourges of the art world might be lurking. During the post-structuralist thaw however, when from the “early eighties” onwards borders became porous, and once irreconcilable dichotomies like retinal, cerebral¹ and so on drew nearer, conceptual art started developing new ways of working aesthetically within a discursive realm.

For decades those offerings of aesthetic stimuli freed of any ulterior motives had to struggle against being mistaken for decoration. Within the range of the culturally hegemonial states, beauty had fallen so thoroughly from grace that the mass media was able to attend to it all the more efficiently - even monopolize it. Right there in advertising and product design Markus Ebner's palette is applied, even though as mere decoration with the purpose of directing attention. And precisely not there, rather within autonomous painting, Ebner returns freedom to those functionalized colors by releasing throbbing powerlines from their service to the brain, to which they had been busy transferring messages subtly and insistently, and allows them to be themselves: planes that expand and contract, approach and recede, and whose intense presence triggers associations to sound and other sensory perceptions.

¹ Marcel Duchamp used to divide visual arts into so called retinal and cerebral ones.

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The horizontal layering won't brook any inattentiveness. Neither interruptions nor details distract the eye. No diagonals suggest up and down, rising or falling; no densifications and openings are reminiscent of bodies or energy, no part of the whole puts out its antennae into unpainted surroundings. Within a zone devoid of all metaphors and unfettered by semantic proposals, vision recovers some of its innocence. Hence it obviously does work, the frequently doubted reversal of the damage done. The individually and culturally developed crust of associations blocking the colors now unveils their mutual influence, the change from satin finish to silky sheen and the subdued turbulence beneath smoothed textures.

To begin with, striving for the surface's homogeneity has as little chance of success as the endeavour to square the circle. After all in painting each act is unrepeatable, every trace remains visible; uniformity is achieved only by mechanical means. And this unique selling point of painting does reveal itself to close inspection: the grown thing within the created one, the gradually emerged structure under sleek perfection. That's what painting looks like when spontaneous gesturing is studiously avoided.

Recognition of this consistency requires an alertness for what Josef Albers used to call *Interaction of Color*. For deeming color the "painting's most relative element", he was relating to the impossibility to isolate 'pure' color from its 'environment'.

Something similar applies to form, the subjectivity of which is highlighted by level and hence neutral streaks. The clarity of the evenly stratified zones contains neither secrets nor surprises, which renders their distortion due to only the slightest movement of the observer all the more striking.

Despite the vehemence of these strips pushed to ultimate luminosity their consonance remains just that: a calm vibration instead of a jarring crescendo, and as a consequence the pictorial realization of the concept that there is strength within calmness – or within Herzogspitalstrasse, in case somebody should bother to seize on ideas of past decades instead of inventing additional wheels.

Text: Charlotte Lindenberg