

Questions about a contemporary style of painting with digital equipment

Compression. Hatching. Space. Emptiness. Fullness. Opulence. Construction. Machine. Architecture. Ornament. Formal clarification. Fuzziness of content. Colour reduction. Staccato. Rhythm. Throbbing bass. Clear statement. Poetry. Mystery. All of this: painting.

An artist puts questions to painting. To one of the most ancient visual media. Knowing about digital media and their tools, but also with the expertise for handling classical painting equipment. The present painting of Christoph Schirmer is marked by high-degree clarity and reduction in colour and form, almost meditative. Mysterious at the same time, not narrative, but has more to do with space forming, very specifically and knowledgeably deploying emptiness and fullness to produce a compositional balance. The many parts of a composition in his painting culminate as a compositional totality, even when they are disposed in form and content in a more additive way, encapsulated into one another. A painting by Christoph Schirmer can be generated like a digital image developed with an image-editing program – but here the medium of painting accentuates all the more that this is a process of invention from the real world, not post-production from a virtual one. Working with the formal elements that produce a picture as a totality, working with the basic prerequisites of picture production, of painting per se, gives Schirmer his drive. Besides the abstract, tectonically constructed spatial configurations and the very specifically deployed empty spaces, we keep finding forms reminiscent of machines, gear wheels, chains and metal. These forms evolve out of Schirmer's 'non-painter' life, that of a staunch and inspired mountain biker. But it seems impossible to construe a readable content out of the forms and compositions, difficult enough even to describe this painting with mere words; eyes can simply do this better.

Composition and production of a painting takes time. The artist challenges the observer to take time as well. Especially Schirmer's brand new works make this claim on me. Meanwhile, the earlier works seem far more predestined to claim time because of their incredible abundance of pictorial information and richness of forms, their rampant growth covering almost the whole of the pictorial space, often in loud, robust colours. But this exuberant abundance – far more reminiscent of digital worlds of images than his new pictorial constructions – conjure up an almost contradictory reaction in me; it's too much, my eyes find nowhere to focus and to contemplate; they wander on, perhaps to the next picture. This may have something to do with my age, that I'm not so accustomed to this world of images teeming with "too much information", even if I thoroughly appreciate and grasp the theoretical background of these paintings. And it's wise of Schirmer to show two somewhat earlier works in the exhibition so we comprehend where his current painting is coming from. In his new

works it is particularly the empty spaces that becalm the compositions, and the compactions help to initiate the eye in into the picture's mystery – at least this is how they affect me. This happened to me already at my first encounter with three of Schirmer's graphics in the Galerie Bechter Kastowsky; I almost walked past them, only to notice that they exert a pull, that something in them stops the eye, draws it in deeper into the space-and-time compositions, into the textures, the shimmering surfaces and dark depths.

This is painting that doesn't tell stories, doesn't offer tangible spaces, nor does it imitate perceived light and shade situations, but works with space, form and light in an image-constructing form. The word abstract is not sufficient as terminology. The picture's totality seems abstract, but it lives from spatially constructed densities, from configurations that are also poetic through and through, because they open the door to mystery. Painting, that knows it has a great deal ahead of it.

Andreas Hoffer, Curator Essl Museum, 2015.

Translated by Abigail Prohaska, Berlin, 2015.