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Lost in Thought

Painting as a Process in Daniel Gallmann's Work

There are pictures you forget as soon as you walk away, and there are others you can't get out of your head, even long after you have walked away. Daniel Gallmann's pair of pictures "Mutter mit Kind" ("Mother with Child") and "Landschaft" ("Landscape") certainly belong to the second category. The constant repetition of "only" these two motifs between culture and nature reinforces the beat of the rhythm in visual memory. Is Gallmann's art jazz, before the artist knows it himself? "In the endless repetition of archetypal images, the prototypes of painting, I want to rediscover what is special, what is inexplicable in the image for myself."

The principle of the arrangement of the series is striking: every picture is the same, and yet each is different. A picture is not a picture. And no picture is a picture. While the forms remain the same, the way the painting is done is always new. The layers of color merge, overlap; they repeat and yet they are not repeated. A machine might actually be able to do the preliminary work, which the painter could finish. Multiple multiples, so to speak. And that in an edition of 1300 one-of-kind works already, hanging on the wall in blocks. What this process is based on is not so much a compulsive repetition, but rather an obsession with the truth of an artistic idea: "to rediscover origin and purpose in a picture."

For the philosopher of existence Søren Kierkegaard, happiness is found in repetition. He regards the repeatability of experience not as a banal, commonplace routine, but rather as the existential experience of happiness, as opposed to memory, which is ultimately unhappy, because it is passé, and to hope, which is cowardly because it is merely imagined. Thus the famous film sentence: "Play it again, Sam." No one has to call out to Gallmann, "Do it again, Daniel!", he does it lost in thought - without losing himself.

Since 1983 a work has been emerging that beats and breathes - a never-ending opus magnum. The artist is in search of the archetypal image that cannot be represented, but only recognized. While individual things pass, the ideas remain as their immutable archetypal images, as it says in the philosophy books of antiquity - ideas, in Greek eidos or idea, are thought to be forms, genres and generalities of being.

Prime Image - Re-Image

Plato's greatest contribution to the history of thought was his theory of ideas, which reduced the rest of western philosophy to "a footnote to Plato" (A. N. Whitehead). Ideas, according to Plato, are the archetypal images of reality, and objects of the visible world are formed according to them. Every person bears archetypal images in his soul, which determine his actions. Everything that is real, is what it is to the extent that we bear a archetypal image of it in us. For example: the fact that, despite the most diverse forms of bugs, fish and horses, we are able to recognize all these individual creatures as animals, infers that there is a common archetypal image "animal" that all animals have in common and which determines the form of their being. Thus it is the idea of the animal that makes diverse organisms animals.

Overwhelmingly complicated? For a comprehensible demonstration of this two-worlds theory, take a piece of paper and draw a horizontal line across the middle. Draw a circle in the top half with the word "animal" in it and in the bottom half "bug", "fish" and "horse". Now draw an arrow from each animal to the circle, pointing in both directions. On the top is the realm of ideas (the recognizable archetypal image), below is the realm of objects and living creatures (the perceptible image). For Plato, the physical world is subordinated to the realm of ideas. Gallmann, on the other hand, puts both on the same plane of importance, without being able to patch the tear with art. Erwin Panofsky summarized the dilemma in a telling sentence: "The relationship of the eye to the world is really a relationship of the soul to the world of the eye."

The tree wants to be as fully tree as possible, the human being as fully human as possible, justice as fully justice as possible - everything strives to realize its own innate idea in being. In this sense, there are no things, but "only" archetypal images and ideas. The things that may be perceived are merely images of recognizable ideas. What is actually real in what is real is the depth of the realness. In keeping with this, Daniel Gallmann says: "I want people to read the meaning of my pictures."

The flood of images around us rises up like a whirlpool, changes and burns out in the cosmos of mass media. archetypal images, on the other hand, are eternal. The idea of justice always remains what it is. The same is true for the idea of the tree. While millions of images vanish every day, archetypal images know no transience. Therefore, all people and all eros and all madness strive for the eternal.

For Plato, the central point is the idea of the good, which goes far beyond ethics and is simultaneously the origin and the aim of all being. Thus the good is represented as the root of all ideas, rising itself above all of them. It is also Gallmann's leitmotif to "give the image a greater significance again." Does he mean by this the beautiful, the true and the good? "It is my desire to state that, which seems to be taken for granted, as being inexplicable, incomprehensible, rather like Wittgenstein, that it is not how the world is, but rather that it is, which constitutes the mystical."

Landscape with Shepherd

How is a landscape, or a picture of a landscape created? "With the priming," says the artist quite matter-of-factly. And then blue? "Yes, I start with the sky." Blue covers the entire hardboard. The shapes are more free than in a figural picture, where the head has to be on the body of the child. Diffusiveness and tapering off is permitted here. Yet what is a landscape? Is Gallmann showing us a piece of nature, where Heidi, Schellenursli or Peter the goat-herd lives? Vineyards almost like those in the bible? A rucola paradise? Is there the sound of a crescendo rising from the heights, reminiscent of Richard Strauss' "Alpensinfonie"? Are there mafia songs heard in the distance, about blood, honor and secrecy? Fields, meadows and hills in between dream and reality, between purity and immanent urbanization? Is Goethe's Werther about to come driving by in a convertible, seeking solace in viewing the landscape?

There are hardly any virgin landscapes left, unless they may be found in high mountain ranges, in the desert regions of Africa or Asia, in Antarctica. Unlike the urban landscape, in a pure natural landscape only nature appears as a force - embodied as geological folds, plants, and climate. What Gallmann perceives, paints and describes as a landscape defines itself through him. The human being is part of the landscape as a being that acts or produces, as someone going for a walk, or as a farmer. Gallmann's aesthetic landscapes, on the other hand, are the

result of an encounter, a face-to-face experience - without people in the picture. He calls them "pastorals", which stands for the idyllic depiction of herdsman or shepherd scenes in painting. Other models may be added, such as a Dutch landscape of the 17th century, a kitschy postcard from Greece, or the closing picture of a spaghetti western.

Gallmann's landscapes create a site of transition, a limbo, which signifies purgatory as the place for pre-Christian good men and children that have died unbaptized. That sounds old-fashioned and unrealistic. As read poetically, the artist has succeeded in creating this place as a realm suspended in time, cooling off and yet strangely enchanting. In some of the pictures something happens. The rain becomes softer and softer and softer. Occasionally, it simply stops where it is, suspended in the air like a curtain of droplets. Everything comes to a halt. The landscape appears as though between two breaths - motionless, soundless.

The landscape is painted in the picture and painted away at the same time. This is connected with the painting process: the acrylic paint is applied, sanded away with sanding paper and fixed with the binder Caparol. The next layer of color follows. In this way, four to six layers are layered on top of one another - a geological act of painting, so to speak. Landscape in Gallmann's sense presupposes the human being as a self-conscious individual: in observing nature, he frees himself from encroaching notions of order to realize his own aesthetic order in looking at nature. Gallmann as a shepherd shows us his landscape.

In periods when one's own life, the social and political circumstances become confining and one's ideological or religious self-image becomes questionable, turning to nature (or shopping sprees) serves as compensation. Landscape depiction is blossoming in contemporary art as never before. What is sought in nature, as well as in the medium of landscape depiction, is always a counter-image to one's own life. It sounds like a cliché, but the city dweller especially experiences himself in the aesthetic gaze at nature as natural again, in other words as a being with feelings, sensations, and in this he seeks the lost foundation of his existence.

Again and again, poets and artists flee anew from bourgeois constraints, are drawn to the country to experience freedom and happiness there. Gallmann is like a painter who has been painting landscapes all his life and discovers in the end that he has sketched his own self-portrait.

Figures Journeying

The terms nature and nation have the same root: lat. natus, born. In the figurative picture with mother and new-born child, there is basically no action, no development, there is not even a sock lying on the floor. The figures are predetermined in their schematic representation from the beginning. Could this be a counter-proposal to actionism or wild painting? Indeed, Gallmann began his career in the early eighties, when people were hungry for pictures and the colors and shapes were bright, brighter, brightest. The manner of young painters was spectacular, radical and direct. The pictures appeared wild, stormy, punky, cheeky, aggressive and ugly. Every canvas mirrored an Narcissus. Is Gallmann's painting a quiet, ruminating and suffering art now? Is the scope really as narrow as it seems?

Whereas painting in the eighties was a battle zone of assertions of identity and self-confidence, Gallmann's approach corresponds more to selflessness and non-personal identity. "A selfless man, who forgets himself, is a man who forgets something valuable, who devotes himself to others and thus makes a sacrifice - that is a saint. This Christian tradition completely distorts

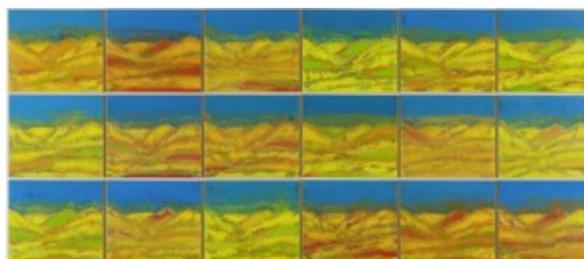
the issue," said the philosopher Vilém Flusser in 1990. "I believe that selflessness is being lost in thought, when I read an exciting book, when I watch a thriller on television. Selflessness is giving up ideology, identity, and entering into a relation. That is a unio mystica, but a unio mystica without the mystical nonsense that is associated with it. We are actually only alive, when we are selfless, lost in thought, and not because we are self-aware."

In one of her last conversations with Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir speaks of the "frigidity" of the man, of his incapacity to forget himself and give himself up entirely to pleasure. In this view, the tremendous pleasure, with which Gallmann conducts the perpetually recurring process of creation like an act of love, embodies his longing for harmony and happiness. "I don't care so much about the working process, I'm sure you understand," says Gallmann, declining to go on in the conversation. Is that really the case? The making, the process of creating, cannot really be a minor matter, can it? The act of coming into the world is in fact the climax...

Regarding Gallmann's pictures, the point is to question the figures. Not the formed figure, which would be merely an object of representation, but rather the forming figure, the process, the path and thus "the as yet unanswered question as to what could become visible on this painted surface." As the French art historian George Didi-Huberman explains further: "The visual event of a painting begins at the crack that separates, most of all, what is represented before our eyes as remembered, from what presents itself as forgotten." Regarding a picture, everything revolves around seeing and forgetting.

Figura originally means outline, detour, digression. Every life has its path. Everything has its proper orbit. A train moves on rails: if it is derailed, an accident happens. A missile has a trajectory, even if it remains invisible. The same is true for fish, wind and stars. The existence of a mother and child is the beginning of the great journey of life. Where does it lead?

Gallmann's figurative picture can lead to the Pieta, but also to the Muslim refugee woman in a shelter for asylum seekers. For life is an odyssey to the self. Do we know who we are? On a path of life to truth and wisdom, we are actually setting out for self-discovery. "Art is ultimately an exercise for the artist himself," says Gallmann. "My work is made first of all and most of all for myself. It goes back to questions I pose to myself."



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