

Working on the Picture Definition.

These days, any thoughtful person who might sit down in a mid-European landscape and, unplugged, mobile-free, watch clouds go by with naked eyes must either be taking part in an advertising shoot or enjoying the so called most beautiful day of the year. The ordinariness of such behaviour has long since past and anyone still practising such is soon to be labelled an eccentric, romantic or Sunday painter.

Direct experience of nature now conditions our sense of being as little as the contemplative observation that once accompanied it. Every perceived panorama is infiltrated by the intrusion of a civilisation-filter, every promise of bilingualism is drowned out. In mass tourism, every lofty sought-after impression is brought down to earth by the cultural massive, where every articulated experience has its own near-kitsch replica.

This contemporary paradigm inevitably underlies the work of someone who is most conscious of it and who encounters its latent paralysis with contradictory reflection. One such person is the Zurich artist Uwe Wittwer who has fostered a concentrated adversity for a number of years and has interestingly found his basis for self-assertion in the traditional processes of printmaking, watercolour and oil painting. The ways and means however with which Wittwer handles these bygone instruments attests to the contemporariness of his preoccupation and constitutes an unspectacular yet productive approach in the discourse-woven times of the post-modern nineties.

Central to Wittwer's artistic conception is the questioning of the presence of the object, its disappearance in our time whirlpool, its captivation on the surface of the framed quadratic. This age-old theme is not theoretically investigated but rather with saturated reflection - in painterly processes which through layering transform their energy to small-format canvases. Virtually recalling tradition, Wittwer primes his canvases with caput mortuum, an iron-oxide pigment also known as Pompejian or Venetian Red, affording a sublime film awaiting further application. The next layered wash of Veronesian Green gives form to our interpretation, playful, somewhere between emphasis and erasure. The actual process of constructing a figuration out of relationships of light and dark develops the contour of the subject from here on. Uwe Wittwer thinks and works in series of motifs, although each completed picture claims its own autonomy within an overall subject matter complex. Thus so, land and cityscapes, still-lives and so called wall Pieces are created: each on the edge of figurative legibility, in the no man's land of a half-light where rational analysis is muted and the narrative, the interpretation, dictates the form. What interests Wittwer is not explicit information (there have long since been more efficient mediums) but the inherent quality of the painted - a sensory approximation as a reflection of the possible. To instigate this imaginary haze, the surface is scaled and distanced as a final and decisive step. The finely calculated blurs, lights, scans and interlocking modulations remove the objects from any simple classification and transform

them into a wide-reaching network of relationships which is as much rooted in the Vanitas whispering of the seventeenth century as in the working areas which concern Luc Tuymens or Gerhard Richter.

On looking closer at this just over a meter square each series of motifs, thematical groupings spring to mind, each randomly replacing the next, creating an arbitrary picture cosmos. With due consideration to the irrelevance of hierarchies in our contemporary viewing habits, be it our reception of headline pages or T.V. screens, bunker architecture trades places with ornamental receptacles, cloud formations with ruined urbanity, murder scenes with interiors equated to decent Swiss citizenship. Facets of the everyday are equally handled for their quality to induce pictorial moments and first moulded into unusual grammarlogues during the process of their painterly conversion. That positions in the recent history of painting are being hereby dialogued has been already mentioned; most striking is probably the refusal of concrete colour-field investigations, which Wittwer uncompromisingly repels in favour of the very physicality of painted applications in wall and floor pieces, thereby implicating his most ironically pitched swan song for utopia and 'immanence.

These premises also inform Wittwer's handling of watercolour. He apparently effortlessly hauls this diminutive genre out of its sensitive cliché and lets it loose, large scale, in the resounding freedom of contemporary pictorial discourse. Watercolour's quality to dissolve contour obliges Wittwer's tendency to transform subject-matter through layering; the venerable sfumato proves itself also here as an appropriate foil for a suggestive and subtle message. On changing backgrounds outlines become shimmers, surfaces reflections: our sequences of perception are fluent yet at the same time static. This erraticness in the image also perforates its semantic. The "Deer" is therefore no huntsman's trophy, the "Ship" no maritime spectacle and the "Wall Piece" no deceased wall-paper charm. They remain as intellectually-loaded zones, whose essential viewing intensifies reflexively without freezing in pure concept. Thus the "Clouds" roam on, as much atmospheric images as metaphors for an ever-changing search for form. Whoever watches them, like Uwe Wittwer, can to his leisure be involved in the middle of an intense discourse: that of working on the picture definition.

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