

Martin Roman Deppner

## Stimulating Irritations: Martin Conrad's pictorial corporeality

Painted images always explore color and surface, spatial and chronological illusions, manifest and hidden motifs, drawing and gesture. Sensory experiences confront us with memories: concrete details appear alongside abstracted infinities. The artist can decide to favor material delimitations or to allow an expansive celebration of paint to become the actual theme. Painterly gesture and temperament play a role—either emphatically charged or reduced to near invisibility, according to the artist's decision. The painted image longs for an active look, and the body is activated by looking—if this look is capable of converting pictorial experiences into a reorganization of perception. Martin Conrad is among those who have taken up this challenge to restructure all of these parameters.

Conrad's painterly temperament trusts in the moment; it glides from the fluid, personal gesture to the precision of definite form. However, such form always bears traces of erasures that remind the viewer of the spontaneity that has been overcome. In its own specific terms, Conrad's color composition confronts and subdues his expansive and liberated brushstroke. The linear elements reproduce worlds of accumulated imagery—potential imagery taken from an individual archive of an ethnological, biological, and geographical character. The magic effect of these lines is linked to children's and young adults' voyages of discovery, to an age characterized by the search for orientation; the lines recapitulate processes of thought and self-discovery as well as the conception of the pictorial image. Simultaneously a feverish vision and an exploratory process within a given pictorial concept, they preserve a hallucinatory experience within the state of adulthood.

This deliberate incorporation of hallucinatory states is supported by the use of complementary color contrasts, for instance, violet and yellow.

Individual glazes of color merge into an unsettling ground. This contributes to the intended renunciation of fixed structures: The force fields that are constructed out of compositional energy always have a decentered character. Color revolts against contour. Every element acts independently, and yet remains inconceivable outside the collective network of interlinked visual experiences.

To pursue a new beginning in the form of an abolition of stable norms, but still to give

structure to the painterly material—that is the goal. The apparently unfinished and the complete are perceived as a unity in which cooperation encompasses the contradictory forces of the two poles of a dichotomy.

By rendering the path of balance sensually present, one is led to a mental operation that is able—by means of the loss of every frame of reference—to simultaneously offer the prize of a free means of orientation. The viewer perceives a conglomeration of motifs that displace meaning and remind one of our brain's synaptic links; they are comparable to a model of how thoughts develop and consciousness emerges. Here, we are not shown the finished mental image, but the process that produces it.

We are thus led to concentrate on contemplating the prospects of an art that demands freedom of thought. With the glimpse of a dimension that permits us to reflect upon freedom *qua* responsible thinking, the demolition of the heterogeneous, complex image—which has been staged by the artist for the eyes of the viewer—is temporarily suspended. Accordingly, it is not indecisiveness that leads the artist to form an image out of contradictions. He is providing a sign for the hesitation that accompanies the departure upon a journey without limit: the sign of a thoughtful pause amidst the superimposed elements of the energetically charged and simultaneously controlled brushwork, the unrestrained application of color and the remembered motif, of crying out and keeping silent.

Conrad leaves biographical traces in the form of nuances of color and occasional flashes of memory; these traces' referential function dissolves and—as the interface of sensory activity—they demand a reorganization of vision. This reorganization activates our corporeal experience by causing us to wander through the image-like entities, which refuse to come into focus and which transform the expected illusion into a vivid experience of the self before the image.

This process can be compared to a journey through an ambivalently dynamic “chromatic corporeality”; with the help of stimulating irritations, these images evoke corporeality by heightening vision into an active experience. This is because the wandering vision demanded by the paintings establishes a link to our corporeal memory by means of the paintings' perceptible departures from and irritations of our expectations; this effect results precisely from the fact that the known 'landmarks' are not simply confirmed, but rather called into question. This is a challenge that is able to combine the recollection of

the unchanging with the journey into the unknown—thus opening our perception to the experience of the development of consciousness in the presence of the image.

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