

## Notes on Spatial Figurations in the Paintings of Aurelia Gratzer

"Nothing is in the mind that was not first in the senses"  
(Saint Thomas Aquinas)

At first sight, the paintings of Aurelia Gratzer seem to be a closed system of sections, lines and structures; compact, rich in contrast, almost industrial. Sometimes, an accent of refulgent colour flashes into the depths, causing a metallicly lustrous area to hit the eye. In addition, exquisitely fine linear constructions alleviate sections; vanishing points perfidiously lead us astray. In their relationship to one another, certain spaces might be rooms. The observers, however, develop points of reference to reality as they scan the pictures - memories of spatial constellations, objects in three-dimensional space. But Aurelia Gratzer torpedoed every urge in the observer's mind to complete the composition; the compositional structure, seemingly clear, is made unclear in order to clarify painting itself, in order to guide the eye, to let it linger and give scope for irritation. And suddenly, we have depth. The balance between memories of space, architecture and objects is illusively disrupted. Here we see a balustrade, there a wall leads to the back, a landing, a grating, masonry; something comes to the fore, something leads to the back; where has the remaining space disappeared to, can we linger here at all? - no; these are spatial constructions, not rooms for people. Because there is no depth. It's only painting.

When looking at painting and indeed at art objects in general, taking the time to do so is a basic prerequisite for achieving cognition. This is true here as well. What we quickly realise is that Aurelia Gratzer is not concerned with a subjective form of externalisation. It is not the moment that counts, colour does not shout out emotion, personal touch does not convey gesture. What we see, therefore, is that the painting is everything but "speed painting". These precise painterly constructs and colour compositions demand exact planning, slow-motion treatment and a meticulous use of painterly instruments. Everything in these paintings - the spaces, the lines, the sections, the choice of colour - is strategically applied in order to structure, to build up the picture as a complex system. And this is something you can see.

Edifices - often via commercial photography - serve as starting points for Gratzner's paintings. The artist collects commercial photos from newspapers, mostly from the real estate pages, bad photos, sometimes retouched, photos which on longer scrutiny reveal their mistakes, for instance when they work with several vanishing points or generate perspectives beyond or even contradictory to real space. Aurelia Gratzner elevates and to a certain degree also deconstructs this construed reality into a totality, respectively into sections, so that it acts as template for her painting - spatial constellations that are reflections of media-filtered reality are filtered yet again by transposition into painting.

Every line takes up space, is always itself a painted area, says Aurelia Gratzner. Accordingly, in her pictorial constructions, graphic elements become painterly ones, linear meshes and grids - as interior structures - turn into colour values which, along with the other elements, are used to generate spatial effects and imaginable depths resembling a maze of perspectives and reconstructions of vaguely remembered spaces.

How much security is evoked at first sight of these paintings! A security we often feel when we encounter clearly set sections and lines combined with smooth stretches of colour or linear structures, when everything appears rational, almost de-emotionalised, neutral. But - here, the essential factor of time comes in - on perusing them longer, safe

ground is pulled away from us, what just seemed so clear becomes unsure: where do these lines lead to? We are thwarted when we try to compose real space out of elements and memories – instead, the heterogeneous and diverse painterly construction becomes a space for painting itself, an imaginary space that the painted surface alone is able to generate, that doesn't take effect as illusion, that doesn't try to cater to or assemble our imaginings and memories. A space that has no intention of conjuring up the harmony of painterly elements, but shows what is construed, and, in profound painterly density, reveals the complexity of the options of perception.

These densifications of construction and painting in Aurelia Gratzner's work have in recent years increasingly eschewed and purified themselves from remembered or given reference systems. Whereas in the earlier pictures, interiors or rooms with objects and furniture were still easily reconstructible through our perception, which is predetermined to detect them, these constructions have been tending to become far more encoded, increasingly turning into inherent painterly systems. Sometimes, irritatingly and often uncannily, the sheer density of painted surfaces seems to render any perception of depth impossible,

This complex play with the flat surface is omnipresent in Aurelia Gratzner's paintings. Flat surfaces can never achieve depth, no matter how much the values, saturations and contrasts of colour applied purportedly thrust themselves to the fore – everything remains flat, everything always remains painting.

Looking at these paintings can become a delightful game of spatial possibilities and impossibilities, which, suggested by Aurelia Gratzner or complemented by our perception, expand the possibilities of painted space.

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