

Painting!

Aurelia Gratzer's painting is different. It's not done rapidly, dashed down, nor slung at the canvas with grand gesture and orgiastic elation. It is precise, uses time, plan, objective and concept to get to the point – or, better: to get to the line and surface. An artist is at work here who is not in a hurry, whose action is not fast, and who doesn't express herself deliberately in riddles. Work is done conscientiously, purposefully with brush and paint – most particularly in dealing with questions of perception.

The painting is coolly calculated. Perhaps too cool for some observers. But this is the fascinating thing about these pictures. We see futurist, architectural spaces, devoid of human life. But this art is by no means smooth. Aurelia Gratzer disrupts smoothness by employing colour options and surface composition to bring back structure, her own artistic touch, an organic approach, her personal feelings and human qualities: the brown tones, the surface structure reminiscent of imitation wood, of walnut veneer, the ornamental wallpaper pattern, seemingly almost printed, not painted – all this draws us into a game of memory. And the questions start.

At first sight everything still seemed quite unambiguous: satiated colour, clear edge, central perspective. But on closer scrutiny we notice: this isn't so unambiguous after all. Disparities, blurredness, irritations crop up more and more the longer we let a picture work on us. What do we really see on the canvas? Do we have to query our own perception? Am I at best looking at my very own, individual reality? Possibly quite different from the reality of my counterpart?

Starting point for Aurelia Gratzer's pictures are usually photos from real estate ads "bad real estate ads", as she stresses with gentle irony. What attracts her as a source is neither the perfectly arranged picture from the architecture magazine, nor the photo she has taken herself and thus already personally filtered; it is the photo visibly altered and assembled on the computer with two or more vanishing points. The painting process starts out from here, quite often with a spontaneous idea for a title. A sketch follows, on paper or directly on the canvas with pastel chalk, then the process continues with a precise development of the surface. Aurelia Gratzer immerses herself in each individual surface element, meanwhile is totally fixated on the painting process per se. With the brush at times free, at times guided by the ruler, she deliberately places transitions and disparities, eventually leaving us with more questions than answers. A picture that promises to be a room at first glance isn't a room at the end. We think we discern skyscraper canyons, window fronts, table edges, our parents' wood veneer perhaps, grandmother's wallpaper pattern even – and in the end the presumed knowledge dissolves again. The images settle in us, we want to grasp them, try to repeatedly, but in the end we cannot. And this tension remains existent, as often as we look at a picture.

In earlier works in the 2000s, we still find the human figure; it is obvious that Aurelia Gratzer is venturing here on the way to abstraction with ornament. The "Naschmarkt" pictures of 2004 also remain strongly figurative. When the pure colour surface dominates, it is broken time and again with motifs such as plants and furniture ("2001 - Auf der Suche nach der Obrigkeit" – Looking for Authority – 2008, "Österreichurlaub" – Holiday in Austria 2009, "Schattenseite" – Dark Side 2010). During the last two or three years, a further development is becoming noticeable in

Aurelia Gratzter's painting, which shifts the abstract element even more dominantly into the foreground, making the interplay with surface, edge, pattern and colour come to a head – without this culmination being recognisable as the “perfect picture”.

Aurelia Gratzter comes from Styria. It is perhaps surprising how the connection to nature and the soil nurtured by her family's farm along with studies in mathematics and then painting became condensed into this precise, indeed painstaking painting technique and aesthetic language in her pictures. One thing is clear: a painter is at work here with an increasingly consistent, straightforward, and uncompromising style. This art has energy: the energy of a petite person who wants go further, spurring herself on mercilessly in her studio. This becomes clear for instance in her current work “Dubai”; although already exhibited in its original form, she has painted over it because she did not feel it was fully developed, not good enough. Perhaps a key picture of the latest development phase is “spacig”, reminiscent of futuristic skyscraper canyons, and yet caught up in the fascination of pairs of opposites, which sustain the suspense in the observer: an emotional approach in the basic feeling versus the meticulousness of the painting process; almost mechanical precision in the execution versus a colourful beauty, but which never becomes superficial.

This painting is contemporary, it is simultaneously future and history. It manifests an artist who like many artists of her generation has overcome the classical questions – figuration or abstraction – in order to go her own way self-assuredly between these polarities. Futuristic-seeming images combine with clear references to art history. Firstly, Aurelia Gratzter uses a graphic element in order to design her spatial puzzle on the canvas (“Papillon 1”, 2012). Secondly, she draws us into perspective abysses, hence to the limits of three-dimensionality. The painted room or space almost becomes a sculpture (“Papillon 2, 2012”).

Aurelia Gratzter belongs to a generation whose visual habits have been formed by photography, film and computer image. But instead of working with video camera or imaging program and thus lead us into fictional, digital worlds, she resolutely uses canvas, brush and paint, therefore remains linked to the human-physical world. She adopts digital visual habits and exploits them for her own painterly experimental arrangement: the power to reproduce reality is vindicated in paint.

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