

Anke Völk: color it! in the Drawing Room Hamburg

Berlin-based artist Anke Völk (* 1965 in Idar-Oberstein) works in the media of painting, drawing, installation, sculpture, (slide) projection and various printing techniques. However, her primary medium and thus the starting point of her artistic conceptions is painting. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe from 1994 to 2000, graduating as a master student under Professor Helmut Dorner.

Anke Völk has been represented previously at the Drawing Room Hamburg – in 2018 with the exhibition “ON”. Her second, current exhibition at the Drawing Room is entitled “color it!” On display are three large-format paintings measuring 250 x 160 cm from 2023, as well as a selection of medium- and small-format paintings created in her Neukölln studio over the past two years. For a number of years now, Anke Völk has been painting exclusively non-representational works on various media such as canvas, or cardboard attached to canvas. Particularly the large-format paintings are generated through a rather slow process, with the carrier lying on the floor. Unlike many other painters, she does not produce several paintings at once. Bit by bit, each individual painting is worked on and completed.

At first glance, one might get the impression that Anke Völk’s works are mechanically-produced, i.e., they could be photographs or large-format prints. However, when we approach her works more closely, we notice several layers of structure and colour, above and below each other, which disclose the haptic quality of her images. To a certain extent, the process by which

her paintings have been created is apparent. It becomes clear that they are produced in a directly physical way, almost through a performative act, albeit to the exclusion of any audience. They are certainly characterised by multi-perspectival depths and shallows, insights and vistas, complex convolutions of expressive brushwork, and other painterly balancing acts and adventures. Her picture surfaces are full of the dichotomy of stillness and movement, light and shadow, colours and background. There is no way they can be grasped at first glance. Sometimes, the viewer’s gaze is thrown back at him; sometimes, he is drawn into the images by something resembling a centrifugal force.



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The three large formats in particular encourage viewers to admit the paintings' emotional impact – on an intellectual level, certainly, but also in a direct physical relationship, as a counterpart they cannot ignore.

The very title of the exhibition “color it!” is suggestive of Anke Völk's intentions. The choice of colours, which she applies to the large formats expressively and yet in a highly concentrated manner with a self-made painting tool, an 80-cm-wide brush, plays a major role. Anke Völk mixes her own colours from special pigments, and she attaches great importance to their meticulous selection. To achieve special effects, she often uses metallic pigments, whose shimmering results are reminiscent of the iridescent glow of insect carapaces.

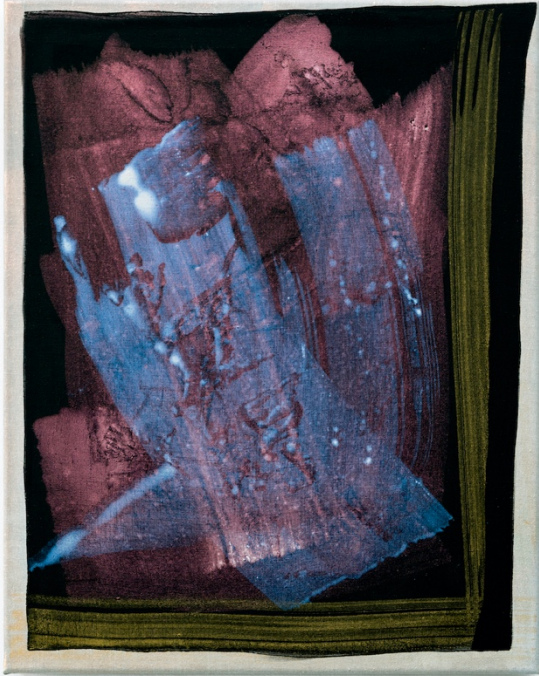
To break up the surfaces of her paintings, Anke Völk occasionally employs incisions. Using a pointed nail, she penetrates the layer of paint either in a free, gestural movement or a strictly ruled line, more radially. On the one hand, this treatment gives the paintings an additional individual touch; on the other hand, it creates a refraction that is both irritating and beneficial, loosely based, so to speak, on Nam June Paik's famous bon mot, “When too perfect, dear God angry”.

However, “color it!” can also be read in another way. When the two words of the English-language exhibition title are merged and the “c” is replaced by a “k”, the result is the German word “Kolorit”, meaning coloration. This is a key term in art history, primarily understood to indicate a painter's individual chromatic signature. The term “coloration” is also used to describe the selection, harmony, shading, and interplay of the various colours in a painting. Of course, all this plays a vital role in Anke Völk's work.



The juxtaposition of matt and glossy colours in the paintings creates vibrant surfaces with a special effect of depth. Another typical feature of her working method is empty spaces on the canvas, which are created by the artist partially removing single layers of paint when they are wet, either to leave the result or to apply new layers.

This subtractive and additive process creates distinct, extremely lively surface structures. Anke Völk's works are also reminiscent of visual concepts from worlds outside painting, such as microscopic images or imaging procedures in the natural sciences. Clear, indexical signs establishing obvious references to the real world are not to be found in her purely abstract paintings, however. Her painting does not imitate anything external, therefore: it is simply itself.



In an artist's statement, Anke Völk made the following comment on her painting: "In my artistic understanding of a painting that transcends genres, I examine the boundaries of the image or extend them within the painting, the image carrier, and the place where the painting takes place." The focus of her pictorial investigations is on several questions: "Where does a painting actually finish? How is it distinguished from its surroundings? Where is the end?"

Anke Völk's unusual pictorial conceptions involve her in painting's enduring redefinition process, helping to demonstrate how this medium, so often declared dead, is still alive and kicking.

In October, November and December 2023, Anke Völk will be a fellow of the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles. We can look forward to discovering how the Californian light affects her future colour palette.

Nicole Büsing & Heiko Klaas
(Translation: Lucinda Rennison)

Anke Voelk
color it!

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Opening Hours: Tuesday - Thursday from 12 - 7 pm and by appointment

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