

Christian Haake
instrumentals

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“To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space.”¹

Instrumentals are pieces of music without words that are more difficult to understand by comparison to those with lyrics. In his most recent abstractions with reduced formal language, Christian Haake creates an analogy to such music; here, too, it is impossible to pin down an obvious narrative. Thus, any attempt at interpretation is always an approximation to something that cannot be fully explained.



The ambiguity, the lack of figuration leads to a less conscious response from the recipient, whether listening or watching. And so, it may also result in activation of memory and imagination, both elementary themes in Haake's work, especially their relation to architecture and spaces, whose scales, perspectives and sections he employs as his own variables.

In this way, he frequently reveals the fragility of temporality, permanence or credibility and negotiates them instead as promises, deceptions or imagination. In his “reality games”² cognitive and sensory perception itself becomes the object.

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes*, 2011 [1960]. p. 202

² Thorsten Jantschek, Let's talk about memories – Versuch über Christian Haakes Wirklichkeitsspiele, in: Janneke de Vries (GAK Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst) (ed.), *White Elephant*, 2011. p. 20 ff.

The new works can also be grasped in this formal and thematic context. The focus is on painting and drawing, although the works are produced on wooden panels with no canvas and the form-finding involves industrial processes to some extent. The resultant panel paintings are relief-like, depicting fragments and in some cases resembling fragments themselves.

The artist has called his works “architectural diaries”, which could refer to both constructed objects and successive, differing entries about architectural forms. Diaries generally consist of blank white pages and are used to record personal experiences and ideas regularly. This is about subjective note-taking, reflection, evaluation, or processing – but also about recording what is seen and felt, saving it from oblivion.

It is in this spirit that Christian Haake approaches the forms he recreates from memory. A process that can be described, in the words of Thomas Scheibitz, as a process of imitation leading to similarity, which serves our desire for recognisable, familiar images. He writes: “I see the beauty of similarity in its lacking exactitude, it is not immediately recognisable. (...) [And] if we enjoy the reiteration and discovery of processes, details and fragments of reality (seemingly, or perceived, or known as given), this applies to the simplification of abstraction as much as to the figurative or representational. No matter – nothing we have seen for the first time is seen in exactly the same way as we see it, however depicted, for the second time.”³

When we look at Christian Haake's works, we see something seen again, for the first time. But what do we see there – between mural and sculpture, in the changing of perspectives, face-to-face or a view from above, simultaneously a part and the whole, reduced or enlarged?



³ Thomas Scheibitz, Über Ähnlichkeit, in: Berlin Art Week Magazine, 2019. p. 83

There may be walls, doors, windows and vents, but also a building site, an empty space, floor plan and sketch – elsewhere or at the same time, rays, symbols, inscriptions, typography and trademarks. The visual detail becomes ambiguous, a missing snippet of reality in the illusionary pictorial space. The deep-drawn inlaid windows look like panes of glass and resemble packaging – shiny, dull or barred, with or without traces of grime. Occasionally they permit us to look inside, behind – to the foundations? Christian Haake's formal language demands the semiotics of imagination.



We surmise layers and superimpositions, inclusions and omissions on the works' generally whitish surfaces. The artist meticulously adds and removes: in the interplay of additive and subtractive processes, he engages in memory work on the constructed image.

Different traces overlap over time. Different uses alternate, in some places there is still a remnant of what came before, in others a fresh coat of paint, a new promise – at the edges, we can discern traces of what has been. The works hint at their own creative process, reveal their production, and – in a double sense – they create a visual language of signs of use.

In this way, ultimately the architectural diaries are both an object and a chronicle: the individual entries of

material and form are not recorded one after another, but one on top of the other. They take on a physicality and yet resemble a palimpsest whose original text is the white primer on the wooden panel.

Consequently, white is not a neutral background material but a first, pragmatic and meaningful setting; a large proportion of Haake's work is defined by a whitish colour palette.

The cultural symbolism and the perceptual psychological content of colours are manifold, especially in the case of white. They encompass extremes and opposites including life and death, light and cold, abandonment and infinity, emptiness and fullness. Dialectical states are evoked – and even before any specific symbolic meanings, it is these that appear characteristic of Christian Haake's works.

Thinking associatively of the *carte blanche*, the “white card” – it signifies a blank cheque, unlimited authority or a free hand. Here, white is the colour of freedom or unconditional potential. Translated into the artistic freedom to decide and act, this represents a key aspect in the conception of Christian Haake's works. Here, the Instrumentals function in the sense of a set of instruments, a repertoire of tools, a quantity of means, the sum of possibilities. Haake's industrial imaging processes include lasers and thermoforming. Once the shapes or depths have been set, his degree of freedom in the following processing is restricted or defined. In this way, he creates a field of tension between leeway and limitations – order and structure combine with the form-breaking forces of other tools.



Between, under or around the resulting figures, the whitish surface often dominates the image. It is not unlike a canvas (or a projection surface) – sometimes whiter, sometimes covered in traces. Neutrality is a connotation often attributed to white as a colour and a non-colour, but Christian Haake's use of it here can be seen more as an attempt at neutralisation. Between remembering and forgetting, the subjectivity of perception is anonymised and the internal field of observation is expanded.

Gaston Bachelard writes in his *Poetics of Space* that the power of imagination is decisive even in the initial experience, the first observation of a phenomenon, and that this does not only influence the aspect of memory: “In point of fact, daydreaming, from the very first second, is an entirely constituted state. We do not see it start, and yet it always starts the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of elsewhere. When this elsewhere is in natural surroundings, that is, when it is not lodged in the houses of the past, it is immense. And one might say that daydream is original contemplation.”⁴



Memory and imagination can no longer be separated, and so they evoke a simultaneity in Christian Haake's works. Traces of memories of daydreams overlap, linking up with familiar formal worlds that were never precisely that way; they are always more a sense of, an imagining of what has been seen. Forms and fragments of a supposed reality become an image, and a new process of imagination can begin.

Sarah Maria Kaiser
(Translation: Lucinda Rennison)

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes*, 2011 [1960]. p. 186