

Imi Knoebel / Rolf Rose / Henrik Eiben. Colour and Form

If we make an intensive, curatorial exploration of the phenomenon of abstraction in the most recent past, we find that the term has lost its meaning. What is abstraction? Does it make sense at all to use this category when describing works of art, for example with the words “that is an abstract painting”? ‘Abstract’ means—very generally—the description of not clearly identifiable, in other words non-figurative visual structures. What is the significance of such attempts at description? Do not all artists abstract something with their depictions, as they disassociate what is important for them from an overall context? With works on paper by Imi Knoebel (born 1940), Rolf Rose (born 1933) and Henrik Eiben (born 1975), the exhibition *Colour and Form* in the Drawing Room in Hamburg illustrates these facts, drawing on different generations of artists.

In the series of garden pictures by **Imi Knoebel**, different coloured bands of lines, often rich in contrast, and monochrome sections of plastic foil with visible brushstrokes on the surface,



superimpose one another. Their edges are asymmetrical, in other words they have been cut seemingly haphazardly as straight, diagonal or round shapes. Despite the asymmetry of the individual compositions, a grid-like surface can be perceived.

The pictorial motif of this series shows an abstraction of the area of domesticized nature mentioned in the title, similar to the

grids of the garden carpets from the early modern period in Persia. Do the colours that are rich in contrast stand for nature’s diversity of species and the implied geometric forms for the desire to tame them, which then again seems quite absurd in view of the asymmetry?

Perhaps Knoebel's collages simply stand allegorically for the assumption made by the Swiss landscape architect Dieter Kienast (1945–1998) that “the garden is the last luxury of our days because it requires what has become precious in our society: time, attention and space.”

The watercolours by **Rolf Rose** shown in the exhibition *Colour and Form* are depictions using reduced colours, which evoke associations with landscapes due to their horizontal arrangement. This clear structure enables the works to develop a contemplative character, an aspect that also applies to the artist's colour field paintings. The associations with landscapes are triggered above all by the

watercolours in which a horizontal line marks two distinct coloured areas, an upper one that is blue or violet (sky) and a lower one that is green or blue (land or water). The horizon is indicated on the one hand by the clear line made by the paintbrush and is on the other hand also blurred by



the fields of colour merging into one another. The reduced nature of the depiction on the colour surface implies a metaphysical aspect for the artist. Just like the abstraction processes, it also avoids enabling “direct access”. “If one approaches [it = the metaphysical], and one should always do that” Rose says, “it will never allow itself to be grasped, yet [it will] always be present in the background.”

The works of **Henrik Eiben** deal, among other things, with the aspects of space and form. At the same time, the watercolours show formal references to the artist's sculptural works. Some individual geometric-gestural structures, in particular when the paint is mixed with a lot of water and thinly applied, have similarities with Eiben's glass objects, in which different coloured splinters of glass are inserted into geometric track constructions.



The coloured shadows on the wall cast by the fragments of glass looming up into the space have aesthetic similarities to the execution of the surfaces in the watercolours. The transparent aspect suggested on the paper gives the individual compositions a sense of volume, a certain degree of plasticity, through the superimposition of different bands of colour, of line arrangements and shapes. Eiben's use of references between different forms of media illustrate that artistic media reveal new qualities when they are used in cross-media contexts, instead of being implemented in an isolated way, referring only to themselves.

The exhibition *Colour and Form* with works by Imi Knoebel, Rolf Rose and Henrik Eiben illustrates once more that the definition "abstraction" is difficult to apply to gestural, monochrome or geometrically oriented art because every artist begins the process with something representational and works from there—in one case the relations are more evident while in another case they are less visible. The degree of abstraction is determined by the means of reduction, which creates a recognition value, or not, as the case may be. As far back as 1912, Wassily Kandinsky described diversely interwoven relationships in our perception: "In abstraction, what is supposedly representational, reduced to its minimum, must be recognized to be the most potent reality. So we finally see: When the real appears conspicuously large in the larger context of realism and the abstract conspicuously small, and when in the larger context of abstraction this relationship seems to be reversed, in the long run [...] these two poles are identical. The symbol of an allegory can be set between these two antipodes: Realism = Abstraction [...] Abstraction = Realism."

Dr. Oliver Zybok (Director of the Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck)

Speech held on the occasion of the exhibition opening on the 21st of September, 2016

Translation: Gillian Morris, Berlin / Photos: Helge Mundt, Hamburg / Courtesy the artists and Drawing Room, Hamburg