

1996 DR. STEFAN PARADOWSKI

by Dr. Stefan Paradowski, art historian - on the occasion of an exhibition at Galerie Meier, Arth, 1996

The re-invention of abstract painting

He outsmarted most of them. He hit a hook and dropped into the void those who wanted to ban him to the reservation of watercolours. He made an artistic escape and arrived in the land of acrylic painting. He is now in a place where he is hardly suspected, but completely at home and once again ready to take a new artistic leap.

From image to abstraction

The change of technique is accompanied by that of the wearer: the new works are not painted on paper, but mainly on linen or canvas. But this is not the most obvious and essential change: That from the image to the self-image, from the representational to the non-representational. The model is no longer an excerpt from the real world, but the unbound round dance of colours and forms now enjoys priority.

Lawfulness of adventure

Alfons Bürgler has walked the path of abstraction for the last four years. A cross-section of this creative phase is exhibited. The refusal to produce identifiable pictorial content made him neither helpless nor crisis-prone. On the contrary. The artistic search for new territory triggered a creative thrust. The application of painting's own resources produced a tremendous productivity. The temptation is obvious to equate contact with abstraction with a wild adventure. Behind the seemingly unrestrained diversity of the new acrylic works, however, lies a certain consistency, even regularity.

Character in the ball of dashes

It began with many pen strokes. Alfons Bürgler confided in an experiment without knowing its outcome. He speaks of "meditative drawing". The Surrealists would have talked about the "écriture automatique". He produced a multitude of leaves with scribbles, with balls of sticks. From overlaps and superimpositions of the lines, it was possible to read out randomly formed shapes. At some point, Alfons Bürgler emphasized the abstract figures from the existing group of forms. He intuitively distributed the distilled signs over the entire surface. A new pictorial reality, a new painterly possibility based on ground and figure was born.

Variations of the vocabulary

Through this process Alfons Bürgler developed a kind of method for all further artistic explorations. Above all, it was necessary to translate the newly gained knowledge from the medium of drawing into that of painting. The factor of colour was added and the spectrum of expression enlarged. Now the vocabulary could be used in any variation.

Colour matter and calligraphy

To put it simply, Alfons Bürgler's pictorial production is subject to a twofold procedure, which of course is not purposeful, but subject to the risk of the unpredictable. He begins to paint a surface, perceives it as a field that has to be ploughed over and over again. Each time, the matter of colour produces a different constellation of planar elements such as spots, voids, overpaintings, etc. In additional steps, this time in dark or black stroke forms, he sets calligraphic accents, separates color areas or emphasizes their edges, creates dots or hatches, creates closed or open figurations. The strokes paraphrase, i.e. play around the colours.

Language and mood

The color matter and especially the linear interventions characterize the picture character. Each work has its own language and mood. Sometimes the compositions are spontaneously labyrinthine, sometimes almost systematically set down, sometimes more angular or round, sometimes mainly loosely or densely arranged. In any case, the pictures are the fruit of a dictate of discoveries made during the act of painting.

Not appropriation, but invention

Piet Mondrian, a pioneer of modern painting, detached himself from his academic naturalism by aiming for an incomparably strict pictorial order in a dramatically consequent process. His contemporary Wassily Kandinsky mentions the "desperate lines" and the "inner sound" that are essential to modern painting. Alfons Bürgler speaks of an "inner writing" that led him into a new realm of art. In his own way, he thus imitated the turn to non-representation. He did not simply acquire abstract painting, he lived it through and personally reinvented it.

Loyalty through change

Alfons Bürgler should have known that he would not let himself be restricted, as he once explained: "It is far from me to commit myself to a technique or a topic. In this sense, he also remained true to himself with regard to the current exhibition. There are not only pictures of the kind mentioned above. He has been a freelance artist since 1984 and is one of the very few in Canton Schwyz to have made art their profession. It is not up to him to maintain an artistic position he has once found as a trademark. The material paintings created last summer also bear witness to his changeability: The handmade paper includes stalks, twigs, parts of lights and other things. There would also be a lot to say about that...