

Stefan Guggisberg – Resonanz

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Slowly the eye searches its way through Stefan Guggisbergs (*1980, Thun, Switzerland) paintings, all along easily named objects: a chair, a wall, an opening into another room, while the floor is shattered with shapeless forms. The paintings are full of movement that makes rooms go up in smoke and lets objects melt and fall apart into their smallest units of colour. Or is it the other way round, and the rooms grow out of this carpet of colour? The main theme of Guggisberg's work is eminent in the oscillation between abstract colour structures and tangible objects and spaces: It is not the representation of reality, but the artistic process of finding the realisation of the painting itself.

While studying under painter Neo Rauch at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig, Germany, Guggisberg found an original approach of finding his painting intuitively and without a fixed goal, but rather in the course of painting them, as it were. There he developed a time consuming technique for the ground coat: With the brush he nudges oil paint smoothly and in different directions all over the paper, repeating in this manner with several different colours to create a shimmering ground.

Guggisberg calls this structure a "field of possibility", from which any thinkable painting could emerge. With every new artistic interference in the structure the colours merge in a new way, and thus the paintings develop. His interventions, however, are far from arbitrary. Guggisbergs is directed by the ground structure's unique atmosphere that is determined by its brightness and density values, but also by the ability of the paper to absorb the paint. With rubber and brush he treats this fabric and the painting takes on its shape. He seems to favour the searching to the imperative approach. In his black and white work, too, he first grounds the paper black and then works out spaces and objects by applying and deleting.

Mostly he thus creates internal spaces, rooms, out of the ground structure, as if the artistic process were determined by the longing to find a place to cling on to in the midst of this "colour noise" (Guggisberg). Still, the painter leaves the rooms in a diffuse light and never illuminates them completely. As a result, the ground structure becomes a fog that covers the paintings and reduces the viewer's perception to utter invisibility. It is now that his paintings suddenly and surprisingly gain an acoustic dimension. They are very quiet, as if the fog would deaden the sound. This effect is supported by the textile quality of the works. Cloth is eminent in some paintings in the form of clothes, blankets and rags. In others, the ground structure takes one the form of fluffy carpets or wallpapers.

This silence turns the viewer's awareness to the isolation and lack of humans in the paintings.

No windows connect the rooms to the world outside. Even the TV in one painting does not get a channel and flickers. Traces of human presence are visible everywhere: objects, maybe clothes, are scattered across the floors, a table, a chair, furniture. These are intimate spaces, in which man is present only by his absence. Whether they are also homely rooms, as the title of one work, "Island", suggests, is uncertain; isolation looms everywhere. And that rucksack that waits prominently beside a bed: is it really packed for a departure? Will the coats hanging on the walls ever be put on?

Guggisberg's spaces are existential scenes. The world therein is not palpable, it remains diffuse and ever changing. The only constant factor is the ground structure, which bears the potential of new paintings and gives them energy and life, at last.