

Galería Ehrhardt Flórez

“die Welt ist noch auf einen Abend mein”

From April 11 to May 20, 2023

A. Altintas, T. Arnolds, S. Bogner, M. Boschan, A. Breunig, J. B. Lee, J. Burtis, A. Butzer, B. Cottrell, E. P.S. Degenhardt, T. Grötz, P. Haager, P. Kamps, M. Körner, Mehmet & Kazim, J. Newsom, M. Schaufler, J. Schröder, D. Schutter, A. Steinert, F. Stürmer, M. Subidé, A. Tretter, W. Voegele, G. Weaver, U. Wulff, J. Zekoff, J. Zöllner

“die Welt ist noch auf einen Abend mein” [The world is still mine for one night] is an exhibition that could be conceived as an allegory, in the most Benjaminian sense of the term. According to Walter Benjamin, allegory is a specific mode of signification: a continuous metaphor; a translation of the proper sense into the figurative sense. There is no univocal relationship between signified and signifier in a symbolic mode, but rather a multiplicity of meanings. If Benjamin’s allegory has powerful philosophical, aesthetic and historical implications, these are now revealed in this exhibition in the form of personal relationships.

Bringing together twenty-eight German, Spanish, Austrian, British, Korean and American artists under a single title, which directly alludes to the dramatic poem “Dom Karlos. Infant von Spanien” by Friedrich Schiller, this group show offers a subjective vision of what might be understood as an art scene.

Far from certain canonical patterns about movements, schools, generations or styles, these twenty-eight artists establish relationships through common elements that we could situate, albeit in a dispersed fashion, throughout the last two decades.

There are no specific aesthetic or formal elements that unite these artists, but rather a multiplicity of meanings that trace an eclectic, heterogeneous, intimate and particular constellation. Perhaps it is precisely this heterogeneity that gives true meaning, even formally, to an exhibition so full of simultaneities and successions.

“die Welt ist noch auf einen Abend mein” is full of imagined forms, inscriptions, texts, hieroglyphs, landscapes, figures, portraits and eyes.

The simultaneity of background and form, with all the realities and deeper meanings that this entails, could be seen as a unifying element between the works on display. If the question of background and form, in a Matissian sense, is already essential in the conception of painting, here, among the twenty-eight pieces that make up the exhibition, the background fades away and gives way to form, while form itself constructs the background of the painting. Indeed, the exhibition itself consists in ordering background from form.

Thus, to list the first examples, from the transcendental colourful compositions of Wolfgang Voegele and André Butzer, where each painting is a new starting point of being, to the more subdued, organic, figurative, geometric and labyrinthine works of Josef Zekoff and Ulrich Wulff, the background dissolves into patches while figures or forms are integrated, unravelled or atomised over their background.

The same can be seen in other works whose motifs appear more fixed. See the portraits or pictorial schemes of Grace Weaver (her profiles and autobiographical allusions), Monica Subidé (her radical chromatic divisions in portraits), Sarah Bogner (her horses suddenly invading the space of the painting), Paula Kamps (her puppet dog bursting into the painting space with one hand), and John Newsom (his eagle with its soft, tactile brushstrokes). In these cases, the dichotomy becomes evident either through the conscious division of neutral background and figure, or just the opposite: through a figure that builds up the background.

In the more gestural or more extensive brushstrokes, or even in works more representative of landscape, with their numerous nuances and differences, sometimes more lyrical and sometimes more expressionist, the pictorial (and the photographic) is also articulated in relation to the

background and the form: the esoteric apparitions of Maja Körner and her ornate textures and surfaces; Frank Stürmer and the duplicity of a sharp photographed image; Thomas Grötz and the veiled landscape; Philipp Haager and his uncovered skies; Jinn Bronwen Lee and her gloomy, shadowy oculi that hint at that which cannot be seen; Ben Cottrell and his unabashed gesturality; and Anna Steinert and her turbulent, existentialist immediacy.

In this allegorical vision of the multiplicity of meanings, as an allusion to text and inscriptions, the word in relation to the pictorial establishes another route of union in the exhibition. Here, Eric P.S. Degenhardt, Jan Zöllner and Jayme Burtis provide a more mysterious vision of optical and textual elements. While Burtis does so from an approach to the iconography of urban art, Degenhardt does so from an inscription with which, with a minimal intervention written on the back of a small blank sheet of paper, he addresses us through a revealing and simple sentence: "Ich will sagen" [I want to say]. In turn, Jan Zöllner does so in an unsettling and ambiguous work on which he paints: "Nothing to see here".

At the same time, the pictorial support itself, the external form of the painting, configures another way of establishing relations between form and background. In Alexandra Tretter's more spiritual and metaphysical work, which delves into the essence of the subject and the idea of gender, the form not only makes up the background but also the support medium itself, the outline, border and external form of the pictorial. Madeleine Boschan's sculpture also fits into this line, opening up questions from the three-dimensional, the fold, the space and the void, reproducing through the mechanics and material support of the piece a formal extension of the sculptural.

The exhibition is also full of portraits and eyes, gazes that cross paths to examine or avoid us. While we have already mentioned Monica Subidé, André Butzer and Grace Weaver, Mehmet & Kazim and Matthias Schaufli are yet other possible examples. Both are based on very different imaginaries, the former with caricatured figures close to pop or mass culture, and the latter with a more radical pictorial conception where the deconstruction of the plane and the surface uncovers the layers and interior colours of the painting to construct form and volume, situating his characters as latent beacons in the exhibition layout.

The labyrinthine painting of Jana Schröder, in a more frenetic and action-oriented aspect; the utopian of Josef Zekoff, in his more progressive conception of new pictorial horizons; the graphic lucidity of David Schutter and his muted, floating and delicate pencilling on paper; the approximation to emptiness and matter of Adrian Altitas; Andreas Breunig's gesturality and rapturous fluency of strokes and colours; and Thomas Arnolds's optical meticulousness and classicist motifs of columns arranged on vibrant and rough surfaces – these all constitute a group which offers a particular vision of some of the essential questions of painting, in which the pictorial activity itself becomes motif, form, figure and background.

In this extensive and broad vision of the allegorical, there are constant shifts in the gaze; some of the images, elusive, pass rapidly before our eyes, while others become fixed in our memory, hieratic and imperturbable. The paintings speak of life, of art and of the ambiguities of the pictorial image. Some meanings are literal and others remain hidden. Words, images and colours bump up against one another, attract one another, come together and separate again to form new constellations.

A meeting of abundance, ideas and forms, where what Philip II proclaims in "Dom Karlos. Infant von Spanien" gives rise to an exhibition: "The world is mine for one night." It is now, when painting, as if by magic, surprises us again and, emerging from the painter's hands like a miraculous act, moves us again in this small world, which is ours, at least for one more night.