Alex Ruthner

Playing the piano to a glass of water

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In 1994 Dr. Masaru Emoto observed various changes in the appearance of water crystals by freezing water after exposing it to music and spoken word. Even showing images or letters to a small glass of water and freezing it made changes within the crystallization visible. Negative words, or heavy metal music, gave rise to edgy, darker shapes, whilst harmonic music and 'good' words like 'thank you' let the crystals appear in softer, brighter forms. Dr. Masaru Emoto describes it as:

> This world is filled with wonders and mysteries that get more incomprehensible if we try to think of a reason. In a familiar situation, for example, why do dogs exist and why do cats exist? Why do mice exist and why do snakes exist? Why are there cherry blossom trees and why are there willow trees? What is a human being in the first place? As such, there are so many incomprehensible things that we cannot understand at all.

This rather fantastic view of interconnected elements and physical phenomenon could easily be mistaken for an esoteric, spaced-out perception on the cosmos of things. Could an element like water "feel"? Similar to Japanese culture's 'realm of living things', objects like furniture or stones are inhabited by a soul and treated with care and love. The paintings in *Playing the piano to a glass of water* are likewise not subject to a hierarchy – they underline the equal importance of each look taken. Completing his works with direct visual quotes from his own life and intuitive painting, Ruthner emphasizes the subject of existence and it's own ridiculousness.

Standing at the barrier between the real and the unreal, Alex Ruthner's new works follow traditional painting in that they raise the ultimate claim to 'made reality'. This made reality seems to be part of every day life in a very 'me' –centered society in which 'you and me' over examine every detail of life, as if it were something precious and special, worth questioning and marking every move of a daily routine. This crystalline clarity found in each of these moments marks the line upon which Ruthner's new paintings are tripping and to which the viewers gaze should be led.

The interpretative management of Alex Ruthner's work allows another perspective: an aspiration, after Immanuel Kant, to explicitly overcome the impossibility of reaching aesthetic elevation. The infinite number of human attempts to reach this elevated aesthetic (as opposed to evident beauty and decoration) equals an astral projection through the Marden's of stars in the universe – in a glass of water!

This metaphysic approach is not new in Ruthner´s practice, but its dimension is hitting new highs in this group of paintings. The demand to visualize this void is revealed to the viewer upon taking a long close look at the paintings. By following the painting's architecture you will recognize the repeated appearance of figures, patterns, letters and ornamental tattoo. These elements "hug" the painting and fix the process of designing the painting as a living thing.

Alex Ruthner was born in Vienna in 1982, where he currently lives and works. He studied fine at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dusseldorf under Albert Oehlen and at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna under Daniel Richter. Recent shows include Ferien, Grieder Contemporary, Zurich; Electronic Superhighway, Whitechapel Gallery, London; Temptation, Ibid Gallery, Los Angeles; Fix, Millbank Building, presented by Ibid Gallery, London; Unreliable Imitation of Life, Ibid, London, Kunstbureau, Vienna; Nature of Speed, Gallery Exit, Hong Kong; Parallel, Vienna and Brucennial, New York.

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