

reflect glitter shine

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At first glance, the forms and stylistic references of painter Norbert Fleischmann's oeuvre could not be more different: on the one hand, he produces precisely structured pictures which mostly concentrate on basic geometrical shapes and compositions, and on the other, atmospheric depictions of landscapes, figures and interiors. Abstract paintings and images reminiscent of pictogrammes coexist with figurative-narrative references. However, although these works seem so different and contradictory on first sight, when looked at more closely, they form a carefully calculated interplay, in which one part interprets the other. This interaction depends on differentiation to make the relations between the seemingly heterogeneous elements visible and to relativise the clichés of polarised aesthetic concepts.

Dark, muted colours dominate both the figurative and non-figurative pictures, relieved by iridescent metallic accents, which are used sparingly and to sumptuous effect. These are the most striking markers of the subliminal connection between Fleischmann's seemingly contradictory configurations. By spreading this colour repertoire across his different formal and stylistic idioms, the painter seems to be pointing to a correspondence with the fundamentally ambivalent, twilight character of his colour spectrum. Or rather, that the constant alternation between two forms of appearance which characterises iridescence has found a corresponding realisation in the simultaneous difference of his multifaceted stylistic pluralism.

Seen in this context, the title of the exhibition, reflect glitter shine, can also be seen as a metaphor for differentiation. It denotes the unclear, the opalescent, that which cannot be comprehended with one glance or named with a single expression, and so must be described from various different angles.

The pictures of the exhibition are grouped and arranged together in such a way that correspondences and alternate "explanations" are produced, as in sentences, where the meanings of individual words and concepts interact to produce chains of reasoning. After all, we wouldn't actually have any concept of what abstract or figurative meant if they didn't have a conflict-ridden history of different definitions and meanings ascribed to them.

For this history to become clear, it must be seen against a background of general historical and philosophical developments. Although abstraction is often seen as synonymous with enlightened modernism, and mainly associated with constructivist directions in art, it should not be forgotten that the Expressionists also developed theories of abstraction. For example, for Wilhelm Worringer in his 1908 essay "Abstraktion und Einfühlung" (Abstraction and Empathy), abstraction expressed a psychic need to overcome fear within a world experienced as chaotic and threatening. Worringer and his many imitators, influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, believed that a compulsion to repetition and order, motivated by fear, had inspired all abstract geometrical art since primitive times. This diagnosis had much more to do with these interpreters of prehistory than with primitive humans themselves. It seemed to have been long forgotten by the 1950s, when abstract painting was proclaimed as a kind of universal artistic language of the free world. It was propagated almost as a moral authority against the figurative nature of Social Realist art under Communist dictatorships. The changing meaning of the conceptual pair abstract-figurative was illustrated once again in Post-modernism, for example in the works of Peter Halley, who tried in his abstract geometrical cityscapes to show subcutaneous connections which generally remained concealed to the alienated gaze. These are just a few junctures of the conceptual history of abstract art, chosen at random to show the complexity and historical relativity of its spectrum of meanings, which is constantly growing. In its turn, Fleischmann's combination of abstract and figurative art also contributes a new dimension to the existing history.

His pictures do not just impregnate each other with meanings, they do not just interpenetrate each other semantically, but every single one of them also seems to be determined by structures of interpenetration, mirroring and reflection: for example, the symmetrically interconnected triangular forms of "reason", the overlapping gold and silver planes of "juwel", which look like camouflage, the dove-tailing light, shadow, water and land motifs in the landscape quotations inspired by Romanticism, the intersecting bars of "fool" or finally the black, glazed plane of "expand", which the viewers interpenetrate themselves in the form of their own mirror images. In this picture, the dialectic of identity

and difference, the basic concept on which the whole exhibition depends, seems to be focused in the figure of the reflected "I". The self is encountered as another among others in this reflection, a reminder that identity can only be achieved with reference to difference and others and therefore is also subject to constant shifts and transformations. At the same time, however, this picture illustrates the fact that this does not only apply to the identity of the human ego, but also to the changing meanings of concepts. It represents the concept "I" or "ego" like a fragile treasure in glittering gold, whose appearance changes according to how it is looked at and how the light hits it. Thus the paintings show in many different ways that identity is always based on differentiation, or, to put it in other words, that differentiation is always a condition of identity as an inherently fragmentary phenomenon. This is also reminiscent of the way that language works: there is of course a difference between language and what it is used to discuss, or between a conceptual term and what is understood by that term. The arbitrary relationship between these things is a precondition for being able to assign them to each other, and to make communication and the fostering of identity possible as a dynamic, variable process.

The picture as a mirror of inherently differentiated experiences of self and of the oeuvre does not just correspond in Fleischmann's works with the metallic gold and silver colours, but also with further mirror motifs, some of which are overt, whereas others are less obvious. For example, he depicts a magnificent Baroque hall of mirrors, or portrays Subcommandant Marcos, who was also known as the "Lord of Mirrors". This portrait is basically a representation of the gaze in a largely concealed face. The viewer looks into eyes that are looking in their turn, as if confronted with a mirror image of their own behaviour.

The motif of the mask and concealment, the ambivalent iridescence and mirroring, the thematisation of the gaze and the ego as motifs of observation draw our attention to perception as a phenomenon which is focusing, dynamically changing and ephemeral at one and the same time. It is no coincidence that this thematic complex is often associated with the representation of light in Fleischmann's works. Light not only makes things visible at all, but also changes the way we see them. His picture of the moon, which only ever appears when illuminated by the sun's light and always looks different at any one time, can be cited as an exemplary work in this respect. It is not the immediacy of the phenomena in question that is being investigated, but rather their indirect, conditional nature.

There is a correlation between the mediated, temporary and relative nature of all that is visible here, and the consciousness that pictures can never be immediate and adequate expression of feelings and moods, despite frequent categorical claims to the contrary. Pictures are not authentic translations of figures, nature or landscapes, but rather systems of symbols and translations which stem from and represent many different historical, ideological and aesthetic contexts and the connections between them, forming in this way part of their societies' visual vocabulary. Abstract pictures are therefore just as far from so-called reality as the figurative ones, even though the latter tend to be mistaken more often for the reality surrounding them. It is therefore not simply nature to which representations of nature refer, but rather representations of nature themselves, pictures which have already been produced of nature, to which each new and successive picture refers. This is not just a recent development due to media technologies, but can be traced quite easily throughout and using the whole of art history.

This context provides the points of departure for Norbert Fleischmann's works; this is what they represent. In this respect, his art has a genuine connection to language and to signs, even though it does not include words and writing as actual motifs. Even the figurative pictures are not simply copies of reality (in itself a very ambiguous term), but rather representations that follow the rules of Romanticism. "Passage" and "get lost" are artistic reconstructions of an already artistically reconstructed nature, which had already been artificially and artfully formed in the form of landscaped parks. Art here does not serve to idealise nature, but instead consciously uses the strategies of idealisation in order to critically revisit them and at the same time to provide a kind of explanation of how we perceive and represent nature. By consciously resorting to historical modes of nature representation, Fleischmann illustrates how their structures have already become symbolic, bound to a particular time and society. In this way, his paintings make it immediately obvious that every new picture of nature or art is unavoidably subject to these historical aspects, to the symbolism of its times, its social origins and its context in terms of the contemporary art industry. Just as concepts should never be confused with what they are being used to conceptualise, if they are to be used meaningfully, pictures of nature should never be confused with nature itself, if we are to apprehend its differentiated and historically relative identity. These are the kind of insights that Fleischmann's works facilitate, without in any way being limited by them.