

Windows That Aren't Really Windows

by Florian Steininger, 2002

(translation Ida Cerne)

Karl Kriebel's paintings are interfaces between clearly defined positions of form and content. This compromise approach is reflected in the artist's use of window imagery as a metaphor for constructive order.

Kriebel uses broad brushstrokes to carefully apply thinned acrylics to the stretched canvas. Acrylics usually produce an aggressive and artificial effect, but here they blend into the background and are absorbed by the canvas. Fine layers of shimmering color overlap to create a spectrum that ranges from delicate fractured white, then gray, to subdued blue and orange tones. The slightly iridescent layers of color are difficult to distinguish. The result of this consistency of color of the painting material is an immaterial luminosity. The painting appears to shed its actual body and weight, and generates atmosphere as well as a sense of space.

This spatial aspect is strengthened by geometrical markings. Vertical, horizontal and diagonal color-field segments create spatial areas that are somewhat reminiscent of window openings or niches. The suggestion of depth seems to quote the primary function of a classical painting: the paintings as a window onto the reality created by the artist in service to the facts. The Impressionists with their splashes of color, the Symbolists with their flat ornamentation, the abstract Constructivists, and the monochrome, neo-geometric and various abstractionist movements – all are diametrically opposed to classical painting with its emphasis on creating the illusion of space. For them, achieving the two-dimensionality of a panel painting was a priority.

Kriebel uses flat surfaces to circumvent fictive space. Nevertheless, he resists taking an unambiguous direction by involving reality without taking it as his primary point of departure and transforming it into painting in the classical abstract manner. He is much more interested in the act of painting itself, in the tension between motifs of allusion and association and those of self-referentialism. Apart from the issue of figuralism vs. abstraction, Kriebel's most recent imagery is a cross between the free painting process and graphical construction in its formal approach to composition.