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Painted Conceivabilities

1980-1990

The title of this introductory essay on the work of Drach is full of contradictions, which are not perceived as such by the Drach generation, but which then virulently intervene in the reception of art when a more traditional understanding of art exists. Painting is usually understood to be a very subjective, individual process, unless the artist makes use of a meticulous, descriptive, depictive realism, with the aim of making this realism naturalism, to understand the picture as an illusionary optical illusion, to try out craftsmanship in order to picture an aesthetic art. In extreme cases, an idealism can emerge from this realism, which through exaggeration seeks more or less transcendent truths that cannot be read in the object itself, which is nature to be painted. Painting is associated with craftsmanship, indeed with individual character, with handwriting, ecriture, but rarely with thinking.

And yet, since the Renaissance, the conception of the idea, the idea of a work of art, has determined the whole discussion of the last 400 years. The concept is important, less the artisanal execution. The artist is a originator, a creator, who is not actively involved in the slavery of depicting from a model. The artist is free. He sets mind against the craftsmanship of the Middle Ages. In this highly abbreviated historical discussion, questions arise with regard to the position that Drach takes in Austrian painting.

The term "conceivabilities" was coined on July 15, 1987, in conversation with the artist. He accepts thinking, cogito ergo sum, as a primary prerequisite for human existence. Yet he is not willing to let his painting fall under the dictates of thinking, i.e. the logical construct, the aesthetic research, the stringency of inference, the deduction of truth.

It is not untypical for him to speak of conceivabilities, as Musil phrases it in *The Man Without Qualities*. If there is a sense of reality, there must also be a sense of possibility. Thinking is thus just as much subjectivity, individuality, because it is not merely mental comprehension of something predefined. Here the concept touches on painting. The search for the possibilities, the other, the previously unseen leads directly to the question of realism but differently than discussed above. Realism for Drach is not political involvement in tragic-human situations, is not the depiction of reality, not the illusionary representation of something previously seen, but a methodical dealing with the experienced and as a cognitive construct through painting. Reality egocenters on the artist, he becomes the medium, the mediator of highly personal experiences. Drach's concept of realism implies something synthetic, something artificial, something additional that can only be read retinally through the new pictures. Painting becomes an expansion of knowledge, for visualization as alter ego of person and situation. Drach is thus less a craftsman than a creative force field that pushed to express himself. He incorporates this imprint in the image of his psychic notation skills in a situation design, i.e. a narrative as a description, in moments of processes that he has brought to a culmination point through painting.

Typical for his generation is the independence from the representational or the abstract. He began as a figurative painter, turned to abstraction, painted landscapes, and since 1980 he has painted figures between representational and abstract painting. Drach does not argue in his paintings with the recognizability of the situation, this remains a clandestine statement, more hidden and reduced. Like an abstract painter, he puts the meaning on the formulation of the picture through color. Essential is and remains the color, the figures are formed by color.

The painter starts out from his very own *métier*, the setting of color. This setting is a spontaneous work, in slow work phases, in which, in work processes over three to four years, inner conceptions become immanent in the picture, in order to gain a painterly concreteness that seems to contradict the spontaneous beginning. The artistic will is expressive, not expressionistic but vehement, gestural; determined by the technique of acrylic on canvas, thus a fast technique, a swift, rapid color, which the artist can use with washes in combination with glazes or pastoses. Only during the painting process do possibilities crystallize which have to be permanently analytically corrected and considered during the work process.

Ideas cannot be accomplished in the first design when the artist struggles to condense them, when he aspires not only formalisms but also depth in the spiritual sense – hence the glazing technique, hence the revision, hence the slow progress. The spontaneity of the image expression contradicts what has been said so far but it is nevertheless fundamental if we want to adapt to the work of Drach. The element of speed, as introduced by Georges Matthieu in the 1950s into painting is not a theoretical argument for the new generation, the postmodernists.

It is not a matter of quickly determining a momentary position, but of figurations that also do not carry any kind of narrative component, but are nevertheless subject to changes due to experiences of emotional situations, which only become apparent during the temporal sequence when working through: conceivabilities that want to be painted. This is not contradicted by the fact that Drach does not prepare his paintings by preliminary drawings and sketches. His graphic oeuvre on paper consists of autonomous ideas, faster, more momentary realizations that correspond to the lightness of the application on paper, but which are to be seen as pictures in series.

Mostly he works on five or six pictures at the same time; not in order to create an unmistakable series that becomes dominant in his oeuvre as a historical set. Despite the simultaneity of creation, he produces with the aim of avoiding similarities. The series is therefore not a conceptual component, because Drach is afraid of repetition. To this will for art corresponds the separation of painting in acrylic on canvas or acrylic and mixed media on paper. For both forms of expression, there are always several phases; it is an either-or, both are not possible at the same time. When the descriptions of the situation begin in a technique, turn towards the repetition, then Drach changes the medium, he tries to regain a new mental and pictorial freedom, which after the end of the respective phase immediately lead back to other media.

Paul Klee calls his significant painting in the Museum Ludwig in Cologne Haupt- und Nebenwege (“Main and Side Paths”). Drach knows his main path, but he doesn’t shy away from the side paths. He walks them without revealing a breach of style, he believes in his handwriting, he knows about his expressiveness. He only changes the materiality to continue to paint conceivabilities of situations. These situations oscillate, they alternate without losing expressiveness. Drach stands in the tradition of the Nordistic painters of the Danube region, of the excess, the exaggeration, the hyperbole, the assignment of the image against reality; in the knowledge that the kinetic introduction into the work, i.e. the physical involvement, is an important learning process in dealing with one’s own art. This way he paints large formats faster, because they correspond to his physique, the length of his arms.

This work, however, is not a continuous state. Painting takes place in thrusts, that is, with pauses, since the conceptual charging, the enrichment of ideas, is not a medial continuum, i.e. is not marked by the boredom of a second-hand reality. Drach fulfills his own high demands through his painting. Painting as quality, the level of thought as a concept, art as an alternative possibility. His pictures are the redemption of these self-imposed qualities. Painting is not a reckless use of color on a picture carrier, but compression, questioning, and self-awareness.

Painted conceivabilities, therefore, mean the rebellion with the confrontation with tradition, e.g. Willem de Kooning and others abstract expressionists, at the same time questioning one’s own position and also situation, with the awareness that art as an autonomous setting of an individual presents itself as extremely fragile, even if the desire for art is a stylistic necessity in order to be successful in Central European limitations and tries to gain expressive meaningfulness. This expressiveness denies pathos, delight, entertainment, amusement; it renounces the facade mentality of Ringstraße in Vienna, it is looking for the work of Egon Schiele or Jürgen Messensee, to name Austrian tradition, to drive the presentation to the point of a possible binding to a situation. Painting is to be understood as an active, not as a passive technical reaction, but rather as the possibility of articulation as a sign of individual participation in a larger society. Drach does not attack the form of this society, he does not try to create social-revolutionary utopias, he remains the painting observer, who nevertheless searches for the possibilities of a visual utopia.

This search for possibilities is not a slow one, in the sense that works are created over years as a single opus, but a joyfully sought-after encounter, a hoped-for quick reaction over a long period of time, which is reflected in numerous works. Resistance and provocation are also contained like affirmative setting. Drach lives out a free artistic cosmos, which was denied to his previous generations. Drach does not have to break any taboos, for him, painting is self-discovery as an exemplary procedure, as *pars pro toto* for us all. If in the Old Testament

the angel Gabriel had to shake mankind, so today the artist can show painterly alternatives in his situation possibilities, which include food for thought without great revolutions.

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