

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CURTAIN

Some First reflections on Fritz Rupprechter's Paintings

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1999

(Translated from the German by Camilla Nielsen)

WINDOWS

Fritz Rupprechter's Oeuvre has been accompanying me for several years. In this time, we have developed a certain intimacy. For this reason I am not taking recourse to abstract categories when I approach this affinity using words. Rather, I am trying to show what these works and I have in common. It has been said that paintings are like windows.

This reminds me of Rene Magritte's famous *condition humaine* paintings where in one version a canvas stands in front of an open window. The canvas depicts exactly this landscape that lies outside, as it were. An ambivalent painting that alludes to the dual function of windows. On the one hand, they make something external visible to the eye, they show the world outside. On the other, however, they transform what is inside, the room that has windows. A room that gets a window or one more window takes on a new interior quality.

The same thing could be said of paintings that you hang on the wall. They open up a view of a certain world, namely, one that shows the painting. At the same time, however, they change the room in which they are hanging by virtue of their presence. Like a creature that is in a room and that, whether you like it or not, whether one knows it or not, whether we want to know it or not, deploys its impact on to the room.

To hang up his paintings means to take the risk upon oneself to subject oneself to a certain effect, a specific magical effect that is always different in the way one defines it. What kind of windows does Fritz Rupprechter cut into our room? Do they point to a world outside? Hardly. You have to have a skewed gaze symbolically, if one wants to recognize something objective in these lines, colors and surfaces. For this reason, too, his works cannot be described as abstract, since nothing is abstracted from something existing in them.

The artist himself liked to describe his works as 'concrete'. As a consequence the way I first looked at his paintings was with bemusement. I take such immediate feelings serious, since they lead to more interesting paths. In addition to others, laughing is a form of defense that implies aspects one does not allow oneself to see. But if one does actually dare to look at them they lead to an expansion of the field.

If paintings are like windows that give a view of the world outside, while at the same time they change the inside of the room through their presence, then Fritz Rupprechter's works are best likened to curtains hung in front of windows. There they appear to be strangely designed curtain patterns, unimposing, perhaps a bit Japanese and slightly irritating throughout. Let us pursue this metaphor a bit.

CURTAINS

A curtain delimits seeing from the world. It turns a room into a space that actively excludes its exterior and remains in this exclusion. This is something different from bricked up windows. In the latter case the room finds exclusion, and it is no longer able to do anything against it. However, when the curtain is closed the exclusion is intended, it is temporary and could be reversed.

The internalization that is triggered off by a curtain is active. By pulling the curtains the room I make the room into my own current world space, my own 'world inner space'. Through the curtains, the world space suddenly becomes an entity that has a clear structure.

It only extends as far and as wide as my perception.

I can pace the whole the space. It is as big as my retreating self. That is the comfortable part about closing curtains at night. Curtain images bespeak the evening side of existence, more of introversion, of wintertime. But just as windows, curtains do not just close out an exterior world, they also transform the interior world that they delimit. A grotesque counter-example makes the matter even clearer. There is the anecdote about the sparrows that tried to pick at the grapes in a painting by the ancient Greek artist Zeuxis. He prided himself with his illusionist painting, but had to admit a defeat to Parrhasios. The latter had invited Zeuxis to his studio and asked him to move aside the curtain from his new painting. However, the curtain itself was painted, the curtain was the painting. If one imagines such a painted curtain and compares it with Rupprechter's paintings, one notices two things: first, the curtain in the illusionist painting is also an object of representation, whereas Rupprechter's work prompts a departure from an objectivist portrayal of reality.

And second, the trompe-l'Oeil image of the curtain only produces a negative closure, a negative nothing, an empty interior. By contrast, Rupprechter's works instill this interior world not with objects, but with structures, with rhythmic processes, in short, with life. But what is an inner world without objects? Isn't it merely nothing?

INNER WORLD

Here I am addressing a personal connection with the artist which most people would regard as private.

I myself also regard it as a karmic one and also one that represents the most significant link with his Oeuvre. Symptomatically, it is manifested in the fact that we met in Japan and that we are both passionate archers, students of Kyudo.

We also share a more than just intellectual interest in Zen, that is in life beyond thinking, an acceptance of things that cannot be objectively experienced, sometimes an inner world without anything objective which basically comprises the whole

objective 'outer world'.

We imagine an empty room as we have always envisioned one to be, but empty and with average light. The room has windows on all four sides, exactly those windows we have always envisioned. But the room has no door. We do not know how we entered or how we will ever exit, but that does not bother us either.

The room is empty, as I said. But it has one thing, curtains - curtains in front of the windows and pulled curtains. It is exactly the kind of curtains we have always desired. This room lives from these curtains: the style of these curtains structures the entire room.

Or better, we who are sitting in the middle of the room structure this room with the help of the curtains we have selected. There is no difference between us and the curtains, us and this room, us and the structure of the room. It is important how these curtains look for the momentary experience of this room. Perhaps they are made of light, loosely woven linen or of a light, translucent silk, as we identify ourselves with the lightness of light. Or the curtains are made of heavy, dark material, out of a dark-blue velvet, for instance, as we identify ourselves with the self-complacent heaviness of things. Or the curtains are patterned, swinging arabesques, pulling together to form blossoms, are imaginary garden labyrinths, as we identify ourselves with the charming mysterious nature of life. And so forth.

These curtains, this art does not open up a vista of a visible world, but rather puts us in a special mood, in a special attitude, in a special mode of perception.

These curtains, this art describes neither objects nor shapes but rather shows us the otherwise invisible ground on which and through which objects and figures become visible to begin with. This ground is always structured in a different way. It is a ground on which other objects, other figures emerge, crystallize. Such art does not create something perceived but rather what is created is a situation of perception, a specific situation of an experience that is to be defined in a different way.

A STRUCTURE DETERMINED BY FATE

The question that arises from the above has to do with the type of situation evoked by Rupprechter's work. Here one immediately notices the constructive aspects, the clear outlines of the situation the artist confronts us with. What do these constructions tell us about the world? Or better: what world do they establish?

On the one hand, this world reveals a regular juxtaposition of equal prerequisites: beginnings and goals, equal widths and lengths. The unfathomable diversity of reality is reduced to a de-individualized uniformity that does not know an appraising comparison, a self-referentiality that excludes others, the idiosyncrasy of personal stories.

On the other hand, this world reveals a diversity of concrete reality with stripes that

take a different course without denying a principle identity. These life lines, as one could refer to them if one likes, or these events, to put it in more general terms, these phenomena are basically the same but their position on the surfaces shows a path that takes a different course. These paintings are not limited to a specific time, that is, to say, we could be dealing with very short or very long events. Perhaps they are responsible for the angles with which the perpendicular surfaces intersect. Their appearance, however, is determined by the conditions of the base surface. The way the stripes relate to each other results in an iridescent but rigid pattern. At the same time one gets the impression of something unforeseeable, of a system that cannot be entirely analyzed. The memory of order appears, the memory of lawfulness, comprehensibility, but one no longer looks at it, and has to admit that one is only able to describe the principles of this order in a very superficial way, that one can only conjecture laws here without literally knowing the legal text. One can sense that something is speaking to us in a language that we do not understand and of which we also cannot say if it is being spoken by one or many or if it is a jumble of life movements.

Are his paintings subtle ones of life? Or are they surfaces marked by death, by something that has dried up, become petrified and remained? And if they are both at once what, then, is the way in which this world is to be perceived? One is familiar with the feeling that one's life is based on a rigidly structured plan, that one cannot say anything or much about it and that life, seen at a remove and in an objective way, resembles a tragicomic chaos. Is it that life seems to be complete and meaningful, while at the same time it is presented as entirely void of a supporting structure?

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

In this context one might easily harbor illusions regarding feasibility. Regarding the possibilities of the individual to control and clearly understand something. When I looked at Rupprechter's works in this phase I, for instance, thought that Fritz produced the stripes first and then placed them in front of him to observe them before arranging and pasting them next to each other in a composition that appealed to him. How else does one go about creating something beautiful?

In a very different way, as he explained to me. The artist makes one stripe after the other and places them neatly in a pile. He deliberately only has two, at the most three of the preceding stripes in mind, in his personal memory. What was created prior to this lurks in the dark and is no longer visible in the depths of the past, even if it is a short one. It has become corporeal, non-transparent and has assumed a life of its own, that is to say it is beyond control, it continues to have an effect. Only the total proportion is predetermined so that the creative process in which one thing always follows on the heels after another simply runs its course at some point.

Then, however, the artist does not lay the stripes in front of him to inspect them and to exchange them at leisure. Now he actually pastes them next to each other in precisely the order in which they emerged. He relies on the creative process of which he is only one agent. The whole thing has evolved much further than him. Thus he is now curious and interested in seeing what has once again emerged here. To be able to be one's incomplete self and to leave any potential order the way it is trusting that it is then best able to generate itself \mathcal{D} for me this is the room, the inner world that informs Fritz Rupprechter's Oeuvre.