

In the complexity of referentiality

Notes on Claudia Peill's painting

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Precise structural deliberations, subtle intrinsic concretion on the one hand, emotional allusions, concealed melancholic narratives on the other – this is what emerges when looking at Claudia Peill's paintings. From the word go the observer inevitably has the feeling that it's all about something that should not really be said or portrayed, something that should be kept secret, something that should be kept in the shade, something to be kept cryptic and covert, while the picture itself focuses on the perception of the beautiful, intelligent surface, that has been created with taste, rationality, acquired skill and instinctive certainty as the primary experience. The balanced – apparently empty – colour fields and the poetic, somewhat nebulous, illustrative fragments are superimposed in a pictorial architecture and create a coherent, compact structure which is concomitantly closed, self-referential and associative and open to external correlations.

Although the overall impression is one of compactness and rational structure, during the process of perception a strange, somewhat cryptic, melancholic emotionality, not directly expressed, surfaces influencing the principle stance to the – apparently – transparent cumulative constellation. The visual world of Claudia Peill is determined by this discrepancy between the rationality of picture construction - which we know from history – sensitising references from Constructionism, Shaped Canvas, Colour Field and the emotionality of the mimetic fragments which suggest an intellectual, poetic, mannerist melancholy originating in the disorientation of the bemused, inexplicit spatiotemporal relations.

This all-assertive, latent melancholy is at the same time articulated as something objective, unrepeatable, constant and as personally micro-narrative, as a biographical reality, i.e. something subjective, transitory, ephemeral, something that can only be captured in private experience. This omnipresent bipolarity charges Claudia Peill's paintings with an emotional tension and intensity.

However, there is always a gentle irritation, a slightly disconcerting annoyance: paradoxically the narrative with its uncontrollable references and associations is exactly the element which, in its clarity and evidence, disturbs the visual thinking in its sensual objectivity and ascertainability. It is not the primary level of the visual that brings across the narrative, but the fact that the visual cannot unfold, i.e. the narrowness of primary visuality. To put it another way: the crisis of credibility of primary visuality is presented as a narrative, whereby the pleasing, pleasant, pictorial surface serves as a backdrop or a curtain. The observer has the impression that the essential is not in the clear pictorial architecture but in the disfunctionality of the creative elements confronted with one another, or in the ambiguity of the correlations between the individual levels of reference.

Everything can be expressed as a memory, whereby the apparently opal ruins of an ancient city and the picturesque tonalities of the non-descriptive colour fields exude an inexplicable, yet ascertainable, physical fatigue, as if movements to discover the spatial situations and their coherences with temporal

happenings were no longer possible. The here and now situation of the pictures disappears behind the past, as if the objects in the picture were not part of our present, but part of their own souvenir images. They create a situation, which the observer only perceives as an allusion to something, although neither the intrinsic relations nor the external references substantiate what is actually happening.

This basic disorientation of functionality of the visual, this prudent and unobtrusive, reserved, low-key and sceptical questioning of intrinsic evidences of the visual become even more fundamental, but also more playful, more covert and masked by the artist embracing a second narrative – the historical referentiality – in the complex frame of reference, and this on two levels: on the one hand linking up to the life and work of the artist Mario Schifano, and on the other, to the legendary ancient Leptis Magna, interweaving associations from the private, anecdotal elements in Schifano's life and work with the other grand history.

This thematic context would suffice to pursue a complex poetic investigation of the possibilities of the visual sphere as a coherent processor of various virtual realities and to query the credibility of the primary visual. However, Claudia Peill goes further: she is interested in the situation in which the crisis of the credibility of the primary visual is demonstrated, not only as a challenge of the intrinsic embodiment, but also as a fundamental mutation of the narrative context.

She works in the density of referentiality whereby the narrative is no longer generated from the reconstruction of happenings and personal relations, from memories and experience, from the process of maturation or evolutionary models, but from the respective complex, intransparent, chaotic, situational relations, in which the actual – reconstructable – stories are of less importance than the constant, arbitrary application of the single, fragmentary connections. In this sense it is not of any fundamental importance for the observer that Claudia Peill expresses pictorial references to Mario Schifano's work in her paintings, as part of her micro-narrative, since this too is part of the cloaking strategy. This does not prevent real and internalised emotional relationships being created, but in the aesthetic structure the referentiality compacted ad absurdum which functions not as true receptiveness, not as an essential and basic alliance with the various realities, but on the contrary, as an ensconce, creating a distance, a kind of self-defence in a hostile context, whereby the artist can only reach her associative points, her references from a completely hidden position.

In this context the picture which creates the relevant associations is in fact what keeps these associations and links hidden behind the mask of complexity. A quiet, gentle, yet deeply subversive poetical licence unfolds in the thicket of references, a licence not with the desire for expansive adventures, but cultivating the intensity of the respective concrete associations, affinities and approaches. Claudia Peill's selection and her approach to Schifano's spirit and life is a wonderful example of the poetic energy of the micro-narrative, which creates new intensity and symbioses.

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