

GALERIE BERND KUGLER

ULRICH WULFF

PQRS

Text

In his show PQRS the artist presents small-scale paintings which at first sight can be assigned to two totally different series – though at a closer look similarities and correspondences are revealed between the more abstract and the more figurative-narrative image forms.

The abstract, more "austere" image types are horizontal formats showing a mirror image scheme: In their centre a bar in t-form is located which vertically divides the composition. To the left and the right slim rectangular stripes are extended just over the middle of the picture. To this vertical outline the horizontal areas below produce a significant contrast.

In this connection the viewer could be reminded of paintings from the American art of the 1960ies he or she is acquainted with (Barnett Newman, Fred Sandback), respectively the corresponding European assimilations of Color Field Painting from the 1980ies and 1990ies (Günther Förg, Helmut Federle).

Those familiar with Ulrich Wulff's art, will at the same time recognize the subject of the piano which appeared in the context of his conceptual painting in the form of an object or a sculpture. In this materialization an imagined resonant cavity plays a role which can evoke a kind of "inner activity". Something is swinging, perhaps just a supposed inaudible sound. The keyboard on the other hand refers to the subject of technology: the machine respectively the mechanism, that can and has to be actuated for "something" to occur.

The bars located in the centre of the keyboard-pictures however act as an interruption of the imagined flow of playing. Here is a disruptive factor, a crack, even a black hole. The peculiar structure derives from a technical apparatus, the *stenography machine* by the Italian Antonio Michela Zucco. His invention is utilized in the Italian Parliament in Rome since 1880 to transfer the speeches of the deputies in real time into a coded shorthand respectively to letters by extension of a MIDI interface.

Beside the topics of communication, coding, extraction and transformation (which in painting history all could refer to abstraction) the artist opens up a discourse in history that is about antique traditions (concerning shorthand, the so called "Tironian notes" date from the first century B.C.), about the power politics of the Roman empire, and the use of language in politics among other things. The exhibition's title, which is a permutation of the letters SPQR, the emblem of a former empire, refers in this context to a shift of power and identity.

A second accumulation of miniature paintings in the exhibition is marked by acute color-form-contrasts and simplified figurative elements, that partly resemble Comic Strip images. The clown-type appears again – an old acquaintance, who with interruptions hangs out in Wulff's imagery since the turn of the millenium. The clown is not only a metaphor for the artist and the social outsider (see e.g.: Heinrich Böll: *Ansichten eines Clowns* [The Clown]) but at the same time an image of the "real" man. Paradoxically it needs masking and role-playing to expose the "true" man in the context of an abstraction process. Thereby the distinctive marks of the clown become independent as autonomous elements. His round nose appears

in the image space as a "free-floating" ball, his extended eyelashes stretch sensor- or keyboard-like to an intensified perception.

Within the varied subjects always a duality appears: Usually two figurations stand opposite each other, meet and watch each other with the potential of contact. Or it is a matter of a "multiple I" that communicates with itself. The stereotyped figurations shown in profile view leave the viewer outside – he is just a witness of what happens.

In the context of the PQRS show the combining of figurative paintings with the more abstract pictorial formulas reveals, among all differences, basic similarities: They are sometimes more and sometimes less formally determined polar or mirror-image constellations, respectively excitingly staged surveys of identity.

Furthermore duality prevails not only within the images, but plays a role in a larger context. The history of painting – especially the saga of abstraction since Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian – encounters a discourse on the evolution of technology as well as on sociology. As a connecting element the subject of the substratum appears with the subject of shorthand as well as with the question of the image object. One hundred years after the formal "inventions" of the avantgardes in art, and in the consciousness of what has happened in the meantime, Ulrich Wulff fuses painting-immanent aspects as well as concrete levels of meaning from the past and present. Both dimensions – that can be cut down to be labelled as art and reality – are approached to each other and brought to cover, as well as outplayed. This pendulum-like movement, a tension between immanence and contextuality that never comes to rest, is an important factor to be comprehended by the viewer, if he or she wants to approach the vitality that is inherent in Wulff's art.

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