

Painting has always been situated between two senses. Although it is obviously made for the sense of sight, it also addresses the sense of touch, albeit less directly so. Touch figures in the physical contact by which paint is applied to the picture's planar support—a moment in which the painterly image is generated in the first place; touch also factors into painting through the potentially tangible material of the finished pictorial surface; or it could be drawn in when a painting depicts objects in space, making them seem as if they were bodies that could be touched. There has always been a haptic quality to the painted image, mediated by the eye. In this manner, painting means interweaving sight and touch, and out of this weave, it invents a multiplicity of possible forms, impressions, and aesthetic values. Indeed, one might also say that not even the concept of pictorial composition is limited to the interplay of visual elements but rather encompasses inherently tactile aspects.

Painting with Crystal and Fur

Thilo Heinzmann's works unfold a painterly program, even where they display concrete material objects. This means that although the surfaces of his pictures may hold, for instance, a crystal, an ammonite, a piece of fur, a peacock feather, or cotton fuzz, these things do not belong in the field of "assemblages," contrary to a categorization demanded by art-historically trained reflexes. One may be led to think that the aim here is to transform the space of painting into another, actually spatially extended dimension: what was once the planar site of visual representation—the canvas—would now figure as a spatially concrete, physical entity upon which material objects are placed. This would (re)define the space of art as a zone in which observers, in their bodiliness, encounter objects. "Art" would consist in negotiating the meetings that take place in this type of space. In fact, however, Heinzmann is concerned with something else. Even when he works with apparently non-painterly materials and techniques, he still pursues a painterly aesthetic.

Let us look at one of the paintings in which fur meets crystal (*D.C.I.B.I.T.*, p. 89). The precise, sharply cut edges of an animal skin are placed so that the texture of the hair is visually emphasized. The black, brown, and white coloring forms a flaming pattern that combines a slightly curved lineature with a smoky visual progression from light to dark. The crystal—an amethyst, in this case—provides a similar play of color in purple hues. Zones of various degrees of transparency and fogginess flow into each other. The irregular, prismatic shape of the stone runs from the outside edges toward the translucent interior in fractured veins of gentle furrows and fissures.

Heinzmann's works make all of these features perceivable, which is to say that he does not treat the surface of the painting as a panel, upon which found objects are simply displayed. Rather, things are arranged here in such a manner that their structures, grains, and coloring become visible. They are offered as visual opportunities, made accessible to the eye; indeed, they are tapped into as sources from which springs a nuanced interplay of optical characteristics. This is a direct link to the pictorial tradition of painting. For one of painting's most

important objectives since the Renaissance has been to open the view onto the world and its things. Or to put it differently: to turn the things that already exist in this world into objects for beholding.

One could also say that the crystal and the fur are visually acknowledged. The medium used to communicate these visual values is classic enough: painting. This also means that abstraction and representation enter into a particular relationship here. First of all, Heinzmann's works are of course determined by the historical caesura that allowed modernist art to temporarily suspend painting's representational program. In Heinzmann's work, this impulse toward abstraction extends to things themselves. That is, the crystal is not here to be seen as the object "crystal," or the fur is not here to be seen as the object "fur," but to be regarded as the source of a wealth of visual impressions. In this movement, however, the abstracting approach also leads back to the history of painting as an art of representation. Even seventeenth-century still life painters, for instance, had to abstract from the objects they were observing in order to reduce them to two-dimensional impressions. In Heinzmann's work, the thing itself becomes the object of this painterly, representational impulse. Precisely because the crystal is undeniably on top of the panel, while also being suspended in its state as a thing, its optical qualities are set free: its color gradient, the refraction of light to which it gives rise, the various degrees of transparency it contains, and so on. Liberated from the state of objecthood, the effect of the material qualities is, in turn, inseparable from modernism's attempts at nonrepresentational abstraction, according to which these values are meant to matter as such. In the present case, painting is representational, or more precisely, it puts things in front of the eye, and yet it is simultaneously abstract and abstracting. Furthermore, it does not derive its quality solely from the fact that it allows both elements to exist side by side, but also because one element determines the other.¹

95 *Marmormosaik* | 2012

Marble: Depicting the Visual Plane

Painting here, therefore, is a double operation: it depicts the wealth of things that populate the world while simultaneously subtracting their objectness. It is concrete and abstract. Painting renders a visual surplus, while it quite practically takes the crystal, the fur, the feather, and the ammonite, as well as the colorful building block or the fossil, and removes them from the hand that might have touched these things in everyday life, picked them up, carried them from here to there, or weighed them. The visual benefit gained by Heinzmann's works, therefore, coincides with a shift that moves things just beyond the horizon of tangibility, so that they just peek out over to



the side on which we might have been able to touch them. Being able to see more means removing something from the area in which it can be accessed by hand. This painterly interplay of representation and withdrawal is especially visible in the marble mosaics. They completely cover the surface of the painting's support in closely laid fragments. This simultaneously doubles the surface and visually elevates it a few centimeters to a slightly higher altitude—the subtle over-and-under weave of the canvas would lie just a little bit deeper. Now, its irregular forms reveal the interplay of uneven structures, and also a limited, internally differentiated palette of gray, white, and brown hues, which also includes the shimmering, embedded particles of the stone. It is possible to discover here an echo of the color of naked canvas. Encrusted, as it were, in marble, as if it had been covered by geological or architectonic activity, the image of a canvas is evoked on the surface made of stone.² The representational and demonstrative function of painting has asserted itself here and claimed the marble as its own element by making it emulate its own regular support—the textile foundation. The place that is thus made accessible unites characteristics of two apparently irreconcilable positions. On the one hand, this work method is linked to the history of painting, as a shrouding and at the same time revealing veil through which the pictorial representational function of the work of art is figured.³ On the other hand, the pattern of intersecting lines resulting from the system of furrows in between the fragments of marble refers to that classic modernist project that has been described as the negation of just this kind of representationalism. The grid—the orthogonal, optical woven pattern—has been understood as a type of optical and semiotic recourse to the material base of painting.⁴ One is painting as something that represents and depicts the world; the other is a self-referential and recursive art that primarily points to its own conditions. Both varieties are present in the marble mosaics. And here is stone—a material that is difficult to surpass in terms of weight, solidity, and haptic concreteness—set up in such a way that—in addition to its obvious materiality (perhaps one sees a geological cross-section of layers of sediment, a wall, or even a paved ground here)—it begins to invent visual fictions, in this way displaying the image of a canvas. Two diametrically opposed kinds of material—marble and fabric—are blended into each other in the realm of the visible.

The Aggregates of Pigment: Color

In the case of the Pigment Paintings, the process of setting visual and material values next to each other takes on a special quality. First of all, pigment does not figure here as the “material” of painting that would be exhibited in order to make the effects of this art form become transparent toward the conditions and processes of its own making. The pigment is also employed without being subjected to any representational function or to the forces of a binding agent. The way in which it is used on Heinzmann's canvases creates, in turn, a genuinely painterly effect. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain the progression from a more delicate to a denser spread, and thus from a lighter to a darker and more intensive blue, red, green, or black. In Western art, this interest in the impact of color and its sensory qualities is inseparable from painterly technique. Heinzmann's works stand in this

tradition, even though they do not preoccupy themselves with questions of how to describe objects and bodies through tracing their outlines or through planar projection. Nowhere does the powder condense into the cloudiest of representations, yet color is also not perceived as a purely optical, intrinsic value—the pigment is too prominent for that. Instead, color is roughened up, as it were, by the pigment.

Furthermore, one can compare the contrast between the coarse, grainy spots and the colored mist, or the fog of spreading hues, on the one hand, with the white surface that is devoid of any sort of canvas texture and characterized by a regular unevenness, on the other. In this juxtaposition, the interplay between various types of painterly *faktura* is deployed, but with a slight shift.⁵ Thus, the work and its impact are set in motion through an element—pigment powder—whose lack of aggregation and non-submission to binding forces would usually put it in a place that precedes the work process. This also opens up new ways to mix the colors, which are not first dissolved in a chemical medium and then presented to the eye as a compact visual tone that can in turn be mixed with other hues. Instead, “mixing” here signifies a relationship that takes place directly within the eye as an optical combination, resulting from an interplay of the pigment's material qualities and its application to the structured surface. This creates mono- or polychromatic effects that include the transitions between various degrees of color, as well as the inherent transition the paint makes, from a material carrier to an optical value. Meaning: color is present here as both hue and material.

Procedures that resemble these explorations of new color spectra can be observed in the Styrofoam and (some) of the Hessian Paintings, as well as in the *Porcelain Paintings*. However, Heinzmann proceeds with these materials in the exact opposite way. Here, the paint does not appear in a powdery, dustlike consistency; rather, the pigment is mixed with resin. The resulting variously colored liquids are then poured on so that they form intersecting traces. Some of these trajectories of paint are of a homogenous tone, while others display hardened streams of various degrees of color, lying side by side. The expression “application of paint” only does insufficient justice to the result, because it presupposes a stable support, a surface, *onto which* a colored substance is added. But here the structural fields thus created—which seem to oscillate between brushstroke and pure flow of color—are sometimes absorbed by the canvas, while other times they remain distinctly above that ground, creating reflective surfaces of deceptive moistness and liquidity. Sunk into the pores of the fabric and then gleaming on top of it, almost like puddles, the colors play around their usual baseline, the horizon of the painting's surface. Deeper and flatter than usual, duller and wetter, they complement the work of the Pigment Paintings. While the Pigment Paintings allow the graininess of the colors to fan out



in a kind of Northern Lights spectra, these latter examples go off on a search for the multifaceted quality that is inherent in paint as a fluid medium. Finally, in the case of the *Porcelain Paintings*, the color white appears in various states of glaze (iridescent) or non-glaze (matte), scattered across the irregular mini-peaks and valleys, the winding slopes and surfaces of the porcelain bodies, like isolated flower petals jutting out of the painting's surface. By expanding it into actual space, the paint here is, in a certain way, exposed to a play of shadows that is not subjected to the regularizing distribution that occurs on the picture's even plane. Thus, Heinzmann's work unfolds different states of chromaticity in conjunction with diverse materials of different colors. Color appears in alternating aggregate states, which in turn modulate its optical effects.

Horizon of Touch

As soon as the materials have found their place on the surface of the painting, they appear on a vertical plane before the eye of the beholder, separated by the distance of the gaze. Their material qualities unfold for the eye. The powdery quality of the pigment, the hairiness of the fur, the loose density of the cotton—all of these haptic values are accessed *visually*. At first sight, this type of work is based on two leading artistic values that have been in effect at least since the advent of classic modernism: texture and *faktura*. It is not, however, identical with either one. By the term texture one would understand the various types of marks of a given work's surface that render its material haptic qualities, its roughness, its smoothness, its unpolished grain, to various degrees of visibility. *Faktura*, by contrast, would be the kind of marking that refers to the way the material has been worked upon, thus constituting an index of the artist as the one who has invested labor in the work's production.⁶ The mode in which Heinzmann deals with surfaces and materials is related to both, but the focus is on the surface qualities of artistic materials in general: the texture of fur; the matte, iridescent, hardened surface of cooled tin that still conveys an impression of fluidity; porcelain bodies displaying various degrees of enameling that reflect or do not reflect at all; the fine weave of the canvas on which these things lie; the rough weave of the hessian, which is in turn treated in different ways, put into various states of smoothness and rigidity. This kind of “working the tangible” comprises the white foundation of the Cotton Paintings, created by reworking the surface with the smallest of peaks and valleys; it also comprises the fine little hairs that stand up on the unprocessed outer edges of the canvas; the changing powdery quality of pigment, which ranges from filmy to thick deposits; and the rough or fine grain of the styrofoam. The list goes on. The *Tacmo* series of works then expands this project to include the modulation of various degrees of visual dullness and reflection. On the edge of the color spectrum—black—their various structured zones unfold: the roughened surfaces and smooth spots made with different brush textures and hands—an interplay of material-optical impressions. The light-swallowing surfaces are contrasted with curves and paths that shimmer silkily with light. Involving both texture and *faktura*, Heinzmann's work invents a multiplicity of ways that surfaces can manifest.

This whole enterprise, however, is not a purely art-historical maneuver. The impulse behind it is a different one, having far more to do with the aforementioned desire to depict the wealth of things in this world. When these are made accessible to the sense of sight, it is done in a way that makes it possible to perceive a plenitude of haptic qualities: the fine hairs that stand up on the edges of the canvases; the unraveling threads that stick out of the unhemmed edges of the hessian; the surfaces of canvases that have been roughened and then smoothed over; the double hardness with which a splash of tin is scattered on a light metal plate; the way that paint pigment settles into the smallest notches of the grounding. All of these stimulate the sense of touch. So much haptic value is generated here that it is almost impossible not to imagine actually touching it. Yet the viewers are denied this actual physical contact, which only intensifies the way they experience the horizon of these pictures in front of them. It is a horizon solely accessible through the gaze.

In this light it is now possible to once again take another look at the *Tacmos*. Hand and brush have left their marks on their black surfaces, through a process that is achieved by reversing the traditional manner of working. While the brush, or the hand, normally applies paint, adding layers, here they work in a subtractive, smoothening mode. Dashes, curves, straight lines of various widths and lengths are the result of the fact that the still-damp paint is worked over, that thin films are stripped away from the layers on the surface. This creates traces of that act of touch that is of course denied the viewers. For the view opened by up Heinzmann's paintings encompasses a territory that lies just beyond touch. The silky, matte qualities of the *Tacmos*, the splayed furs, the delicacy of marble dust, the smallest of crystals, the powdered pigment, and the weave of the hessian: all of this challenges the sense of touch, asking to be touched, in a way—and yet is reserved for the eye alone. It is this kind of reservation—ultimately, the reservation of painting—that makes it all the more tangibly attractive.

1 Here, one could also mention the philosopher Edmund Husserl's concept of the suspending power of “image consciousness” (*Bildbewußtsein*). According to Husserl, the optical imagination parenthesizes the weight of (object-related) reality. One might say that the visual abundance of the real in its entire plenitude only emerges in parallel to this type of suspension; see Edmund Husserl, *Phantasie und Bildbewußtsein* (Hamburg, 2006). In the Western tradition, painting was, for a long time, the artistic technique whose depictions of the visible world fulfilled a comparable, objective function. Making things visible on the canvas robbed them of their real weight, but at the same time it reinforced their visual reality.

2 Heinzmann's treatment of the surfaces of the *Tacmos*, of the cotton and Pigment Paintings, makes this very canvas disappear through creating a system of small peaks and valleys in the process of applying paint.

3 See Johannes Endres et al., eds., *Ikonomie des Zwischenraums: Der Schleier als Medium und Metapher* (Munich, 2005).

4 See Rosalind E. Krauss, “Grids,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1994), pp. 8–22.

5 In fact, the category of *faktura* here signifies a subclass within the system of an overall work on surface-structure. See the section on the “Horizon of Touch.”

6 See Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *OCTOBER* 30 (Autumn 1984), pp. 82–119. See also Maria Gough, “Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (Autumn 1999), pp. 32–59.