

Christine Streuli: Biennale

„Go North, Go South, Go East, Go West“

Pictures give birth to painting, painting gives birth to pictures.

Christine Streuli draws inspiration for her pictures from a never-ending fund of visual objects that are freely available to her for her art: this includes paintings from the European and Western art tradition in which she is well versed, as well as figurines, ornaments, decorations and patterns from the non-European treasure-trove of pictures; discoveries in her ordinary environment also belong to this repertoire, such as representations in advertising, screen-savers or the herbarium.

The artist's freedom lies first and foremost in her choice of inception and the pictorial elements that she seeks to transform via art in her new picture, and far less in the freedom of art as execution or even expression. The starting point for her art is always a reaction to visual stimuli, often existing pictures or those that have caught her notice, which are usually transferred to her picture backgrounds via templates of one form or another. The point of departure for the creation of a new picture must therefore be understood in its widest sense: it can often be the case that the artist does not find the precursor to her image in an existing picture outside her own art, but that she discovers a suitable concept for a new painting in the free structure of the grounding of a canvas that has perhaps lain patiently in the studio for weeks waiting for an image to develop from it.

At the Biennale in Venice, Christine Streuli is showing a series of new paintings created expressly for this event, but her intentions extend far beyond the mere presentation of pictures: rather, it is the artist's ambition to open to anyone entering the pavilion the portal to her own artistic realm and that of the vast cosmos of today's art in general. „Go North, Go South, Go East, Go West“ is the large-format title that stares at our backs as we enter the pavilion: it certainly points to the references in this art that come from so many different directions, but it can also be understood as a challenge of comprehension when inspecting the art in this room. The pictures and the framed works on paper, as well as the canvases, all hang on papered or painted walls: thus they become part of a total production in which interference or dialogue develops between the paintings and the background patterns on the walls. Two walls are papered with silk-screen prints of patterns echoing traces of brush strokes that might appear at the beginning of a painting; the picture on the front diagonal wall with its pattern of printed lozenges has its origin in the play of shadows thrown on the wall by the bars under the shed roof – shadows which are also reflected on the wall painting and the pictures hung on top of it, and move over them as the day progresses: the shadow-play of the Venetian light will change the appearance of the pictures and thus create new paintings. The pattern for the painting on the right-hand long wall is orange squares standing on their points, developed as the negative image of the painting on the front wall. On the front diagonal wall, vis-à-vis „Go North...“ hang the pictures „keep distance“ and „closer“, which could be interpreted both as an invitation and a warning.

However, little has yet been said about the extensive series of dual, real and painted pictures of medicinal plants that are framed both within the picture and around the edge: their outlines, which are defined with thick coloured paste, are pressed and squeezed on a painted paper background as if in a herbarium – these reworked monotypes are then mounted on a larger painted background and framed in wood. Hardly anything is said about the very special relationship between drawing and painting in these pictures, also very little about the enthusiasm and boldness in the use of the decorative ornament and its role within the often quasi-exploding – always however: controlled exploding – of the picture. Particular mention should be made concerning the never immediately direct but always conscious and reflected mediation of the transfer of the pictures and their parts to the canvas. What also remains unmentioned, but is patently obvious and inspires our wonderment: the close crossing-over between an intensely heightened, unbridled joy in creating new pictures on the one hand and the greatest possible control and cool distance in the creative process of painting on the other – a painting that produces new, previously unseen images and yet is firmly rooted in the tradition of great art.

Perhaps these words give some indication of how one can engage with the pictures in this room and how one can move within this artist's space.

Beat Wismer