



Stadt Zürich
Kultur

Stadt Zürich
Helmhaus Zürich
Limmatquai 31
8001 Zürich

Tel. 044 251 61 77
Fax 044 261 56 72
www.helmhaus.org

Helmhaus Zürich

26 September to 16 November 2014

Albrecht Schnider Giacomo Santiago Rogado

They push the boundaries of painting – the two Swiss artists Albrecht Schnider and Giacomo Santiago Rogado. Based in Berlin and born in Lucerne, they immerse themselves in their craft with unbridled curiosity. What emerges is “painting about painting” that thrives on the eminent paradigms of art and nature, resulting in an exhibition of almost painful beauty.

They are separated by a generation and united by an almost childlike curiosity and delight in experimentation. Albrecht Schnider (*1958) and Giacomo Santiago Rogado (*1979) pursue their calling – painting pictures – with a passion. And despite the challenge of today's visual overkill, they succeed, motivated by the desire to create beauty that prevails in the face of all that has come before and all that is yet to come.

Over the years, Albrecht Schnider's doubts about the image have almost driven him to despair. Rogado plans every step in advance while also embracing the potential of chance; Schnider took leave of his manually painted acrylic work in the year 2011. His technician in Zurich spraypaints a coated canvas based on a vectorized visual plan that he has sent her from Berlin. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that the painting was originally inspired by the immediacy of gesture, for Schnider is a passionate draftsman. The meticulously planned look of his paintings is derived from countless unconscious drawings. The transfer of unconscious material into an extremely deliberate visual vocabulary is one of the most exciting processes in painting today. It can be insightfully traced in the exhibition at the Helmhaus, which includes not only the most recent work but also selected photographs, sculptures, drawings and a small selection from the artist's countless sketchbooks.

While Giacomo Santiago Rogado's work fills the entire space of a room, Albrecht Schnider produces (landscape) paintings that are smaller than a sheet of A4 paper. So small, in fact, that they open up immeasurable depths and dimensions. Ideal, typical landscapes are key works in the oeuvre of this visually critical artist who seeks authenticity in lost authenticity and finds what he is seeking through loss. The ideal landscape is unadulterated camouflage:

in art, nature bears the colours of camouflage. Art can do what nature can't. Everything is possible in art: art is ideal nature.

Emptiness is one of Schnider's greatest preoccupations. His "blank heads" are portraits and anti-portraits at once. The emptiness invites viewers to mirror themselves in the pictures that make room for many different faces within precisely outlined characterizations. The faces resonate with self-forgetfulness, self-loss and self-abandon, with double lives, androgyny and multiple existences. And they make us wonder what form identity takes in a society in which images are tailor-made – and manipulated.

We figuratively bump our heads on these blank mirror images, for the artist draws us into the depths of his picture planes, thereby addressing one of painting's most venerable concerns: the "handicap" of being compelled to confine three dimensions to a two-dimensional plane. What is figure and what is ground? This is another cardinal issue of painting, explored with theoretical and practical acuity in the work of this historically well-versed artist.

Empty space is crucial to Schnider's sculptures as well, for instance, in a pure white baptistry of a building crowned by nothing less than a chewing gum figure, or a gold vessel studded with chewing gum. The blend of high and low harbours a mystery. Is it an expression of the (unrequited?) longing that has compelled the artist to proceed from one work to the next, over the past 25 years, leaving behind a trail that moves ahead and back between creation and destruction, give and take, full and empty, classical and eccentric, guilt and innocence? Darkly expressive portraits in charcoal, filigree construction drawings of numbers and letters, stylized figures, trees, bars, skulls and, most recently, neo-constructivist compositions: these all are redolent of this equally intellectual and sensual artist's never-ending quest for imagery that still makes sense today.

A publication on Albrecht Schnider with an essay on his extraordinary, existential oeuvre by curator Simon Maurer will be available mid-October, published by Verlag für moderne Kunst in Nuremberg. The book launch will feature a conversation between artist and curator.

There is no such thing as virgin painting, today less than ever. Nonetheless, Giacomo Santiago Rogado dribbles and pours highly pigmented paint on seven-metre-long canvases as if they were the first pictures that had ever been painted. The immaculate canvas receives the pigment untainted. Spectacular the initial gesture of paint poured onto the pre-stretched canvas lying in a basin in the artist's Berlin studio; serene and slow its dissolve as it spreads across the canvas, acquiring a dynamic of its own and luxuriating like coral blossoms or swarms of fish – until movement is arrested when the pigment dries. As it unfolds, Rogado's work records a process, stores time and bears witness to slowness. It emerges in the play between control and chance, between skilled artifice and nature. The approach is intentional. The artist surrenders part of his authorial visual power to nature – and makes an observation that is as matter-of-fact as it is romantic: "I am nature too, after all."

One of the larger paintings known to the history of art has been created for the exhibition at the Helmhaus: it measures some 60 metres and fills a room. Looking at it means standing inside it, being enclosed and becoming part of it. This painting involves both the viewers in front and the world in back, which shines through the weave of the canvas with greater or lesser intensity depending on the light. Rogado's work not only exemplifies how the elements of painting – canvas, structure, painting tools and painter – interact; it is also phenomenology – the study of appearances. It is a space of individual and collective perception; it is a

surface of projection for the world outside and the world inside the viewer; it opens up a mental, emotional panorama.

This art is neither still nor static; it is not rigidly defined; it does not target ideal conditions: it changes. The light-sensitive, vibrant painting is permeable and transparent, breathing through time and receptive to the weather. This art deliberately permits the influence of what is going on around it. It soaks everything in, integrating and harmonizing it, muffling unrest as a sound-absorbing membrane that encircles the room. The lack of closure in the composition makes room for individual interpretations, for contemplation and visual sensations, for seduction and tenderness.

Rogado's monumental and yet vulnerable metapainting returns to the beginnings of painting: the artist has emptied his visual memory, cultivating new and astonishing origins. His belief in nature, magic, alchemy and mysticism sustains his faith in beauty.

The artist repeatedly rises to the challenge of figurative, Baroque-oriented painting as seen in an angular canvas presented in counterpart to the large painting that belongs to the series of "Intuitions". In the room-painting, Rogado clearly incorporates viewers in the pictorial space while the single canvas is concerned with the illusionist mechanisms of painting between the second and third dimensions. Theoretically, the visual elements of the composition extend beyond the edge of the painting, following the haptic rays that emanate from the centre. The path through this seemingly orderly maze – through Arabic colours and the ground plans of ritual sites? – also leads back to the centre, and hence into the depths of the picture, where a window might open up in the room.

Beauty and space in pictures (and pictures in space) is the subject of the "5 o'clock Thesis" at Helmhaus: Daniel Morgenthaler will speak with Julia Gelshorn, associate professor of art history at Freiburg University, and Livio Baumgartner, artist and curator of the art space "Die Diele".

Rarely has an exhibition being so suitable for concerts – it's not surprising since both artists are music aficionados. In the works of Albrecht Schnider, violinist Bettina Boller and pianist Walter Prossnitz will play compositions ranging from classical to new music, from past to present. In Giacomo Santiago Rogado's painted surround, jazz pianist Colin Vallon will give one of his predictably remarkable solo concerts. As always, guided tours and workshops for children and grown-ups will round off the programme.