

AURELIA GRATZER Abstract Perception

by Eva-Maria Bechter, Vienna, 2011.
translated by Abigail Prohaska, Berlin.

Is it at all possible to investigate our own perception? Isn't our visual impression – along with its interpretation – only the unique reality of the individual self? And can this be equated with someone else's reality, perception and interpretation?

These are the questions that are addressed so intensively in Aurelia Gratzter's painting; in the charged field between "authentic" representation and irritation. Two things play a central role here: the feeling for space, which suddenly poses the question of perspective, and the confrontation with a binocular vision that is not influenced by central perspective. To explore these options, she uses the elemental medium of painting – with the age-old tools of paint, a two-dimensional painted ground, and the brush.

Aurelia Gratzter approaches her canvas conceptually by starting out with images from magazines. The source, which from the start is mostly deceptive in its representational capability, is dissected into separate planes. The supposed reality is destroyed, firstly through the keener contours, which trigger the association of a printing process, secondly through the planar "splintering" or fragmentation of what is seen. Each area of colour is treated as equally valid, is individually observed, and executed in paint on the canvas without the causal context of size. The irritations aroused in the beholder – often only after a longer period of observation – are thus already programmed in the painting process. What is rational reality? That is the question lurking behind this process, for reality always relates to two different levels: the level of knowledge and the level of emotional perception. Influenced by the daily confrontation with image, reality, nature and perceptible surroundings we see what seems to be a sky situation in the area at top left of the picture "Solitar". The painting manifests itself in our minds as a section of sky hung with clouds. This recognisable reality is automatically interpreted as having more depth within the totality of the picture, simply because it is interpreted as sky. The putative house with its terrace is positioned much closer to the beholder. And the bright area in the background – perhaps a wall, closing off the swimming pool in the foreground? Is this further back, further forward, or, after all, in one axis with the house wall? How is this perceived? How does this bright rectangle change the total impression of the picture? But here Aurelia Gratzter is also remarking on the fact that there are obviously different rankings in perception. Hence the form of a house, of a bed, the colour of the sky is much more likely to be stowed away in a pigeon hole of effect and reality than the escalator in "Shaft". We use the latter more or less daily, but the form hasn't fixed itself in our awareness to the same extent as the aforementioned objects. This might be a reason why "Shaft" makes a considerably more abstract impression than "Kopf" ("Head"), for instance, or even "Women's Digest". Aurelia Gratzter sees her painting as tending strongly towards abstraction. The individual areas appear with equal validity on the canvas, resulting in a painterly equivalence which uncouples the optic nerve from reality. Recognition is based solely on knowledge about representational capability.

Aurelia Gratzter plays with this theme of abstraction and irritation with finely nuanced skill. She applies a little red to the green, straight delineation of an area in such a way

that the eye of the beholder can then recognise this line automatically in the next orange line as a complementary contrast; the mind connects the two straight lines, although they do not lie on one level. Here the painter is extemporising on the phenomenon of optical illusion.

And she creates illusions not only through painterly execution and colour, but also through her choice of titles. For her, the pictures “need” a title, even though this has nothing at all to do with the composition. Though at first glance her art seems so objective, she manoeuvres her art and all the questions contained within it into abstraction. If the pictures were left without a title, they would be far too hermetic and impersonal. The title, often randomly chosen, gives the picture individuality, but also opens up another level, in which the association of the name is unavoidably sought in the picture as well – but frequently cannot be found.

The enormously charged perceptual dynamism of Gratzer’s pictures is generated by her process of transposing images borrowed from illustrated magazines into the individual picture areas and her painterly refinement in transporting them as absolute equals onto the canvas. One reason for this is that black areas only take effect as such at first glance. The non-colour black is actually never used, which yet again leads to an effect of depth. It is only with time that the beholder can grasp the subtleties contained in the individual areas of a picture in its total complexity. Now that she has given free rein to her palette in her latest works and is allowing pink and blue tones to appear, we recognise that the irritation in perception is by no means at an end for Aurelia Gratzer. The latest pictures are clearer, more precisely formulated, more exact in the treatment of the individual planes, in part also more abstract, if we think of the painting “Shaft”.