

## Michael Burges, or about the objectivity of the subjective

"The seasons are for painters. Watercolors in the sky, reflected in water. Clayey, chalky, earthy, watery, oily, glowing, and flowing colors, all on a small board, a thin piece of fabric. ...The painter of the seasons doesn't feel, smell, or hear anything when looking. He is all eyes, then. He paints them all from memory, also the most fleeting ones, which only last a minute."

(Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Rebus. Gedichte. Der Maler der Jahreszeiten, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, p. 9 ff)

Enzensberger's poem is about a painter's confrontation with nature. The texts on Michael Burges' oeuvre mostly don't relate to nature in a poetical sense, rather to the laws and structures of nature, which rule botany, geology and more and more physics, especially in the many impressive texts by Gerhard Charles Rump, an art theorist and art critic. In the Dusseldorf studio of the artist one gets a sense of the order and the clarity of this way of looking at things in the paintings, which are, on their part, perfectly organized like in only very few artists' studios. The beholder recognizes a system of production and storage. At the same time the pictures give joy to his eyes. The images are arranged in series and remind us of nature from their part, of likenesses and patterns combining experiences with something seen unknowingly.

Even though the succinctly precise titles of the series have a similarly physical character, the single image will break through the barrier of the series, as it is understood as an autonomous setting. The series then turns into a richly varied execution of one and the same pictorial idea without losing the integrity of the single image. These are images building up a puzzle of conceptions of the world acting like in a glass bead game. Via the retina they animate to systemically join the game, to elaborate further. The images always contain a procedural character, seem to be a section of a much more gigantic world, a heavenly cosmos, which, however, can only partly be perceived.

This dialogue of an open work of art (the *opera aperta* of Umberto Eco) is a deliberate one. Basically everything Michael Burges does is carried out very consciously, and conceived virtually. His will to art doesn't aim at mercantile niches or stylistic repetitions, rather it is very strictly bound to his own set of aesthetic criteria. This

process does not realize a preconceived artistic theory (a painting has to be painted in this way and no other), rather it seeks a biographical sequence which will visually implement a world of thinking which is developing further and constantly changing. Burges paints his own sky as a painter of his specific seasons. The division into a constantly self-rejuvenating cycle, the biding a while with what is perceived and that you don't have to see any more in an intuitive process of painting, the broad range of his palette from the monochrome to garish colorism, the concentration on the matter of painting and less on the narrative, the agitated and smooth surfaces of the paintings and further elements of his art allow this comparison with the painter of the sky and the seasons. Cycles as the painterly rhythms of life.

When the work of art is following the idea, then, indeed, the fantasies of chance are a decisive impulse of image creation. Reverse glass paintings (2013), squeegees instead of brushes, fractional images (Virtual space works, 2012) and so forth behind grooved glasses do not allow mathematical calculations. If they were possible, the process of creation became boring. New things occur in a non-determined free space of surprises. The Apollonian principle within the concept leads to Dionysian raptures of colors and optical orgies. Auratic distance mates with great sensuality.

The beholder isn't content with viewing the painting from a distance, he wants to handle it, touch its sensuality. He may try and describe a painting by Burges in words. But in doing so, he would have to formulate an incomprehensible novel of a couple of thousand pages, as the single image withdraws itself from verbalization. Words can always only grasp parts of it. It will always remain an image and refuse to become language, to become controllable by description. This is true for the single picture referring to vision, downright evoking it, whereas expression and intention of a single series can very well be precisely described, which is also indicated by the titles, and by the artist in conversations on the how and why his series were created. In the macrocosm of the series one finds an endless number of microcosms. Burges works out a dialogical relation of a very manifold nature between the series and the individual painting. Here, too, the reflective process is an important part both in thinking and in doing.

This interplay of rationality and emotionality, of thinking and fantasy doesn't constitute an artistic process, rather it grows out of the life-experience of the artist. His scholarly studies of religions, of, a. o. Buddhism, are connoted in his oeuvre without the artist's subjecting himself and being robbed of his artistic freedom or just infringing it. Burges also never gives the impression to be the driven artist. In conversation he keeps calm and factual, revealing a predilection for the latest works. The bourgeois idea of the misunderstood, suffering artist is inappropriate here. With an assurance seldom to be found in artists and with an inherent logic one series after the other is created, every time anew, basically completely new. Yet there is an artistic handwriting allocating all these works to just one artist. This artistic handwriting is not, however, a stylistic clarification, it is the explanation of action.

This action is, on the one hand, a defined intention, and an intuitive, open process on the other. leading to visual events and clarifications. Showing such new worlds doesn't have a descriptive, but always a summoning character. Burges interprets seeing as a play of recognition, an oscillation of inner and outer perception. This recognition seeks deliverance of quotes or any nostalgia as an indication in both past and present. The works always are absolutely new and future-oriented. They include the future, which they confront with the existential testimonies of the radical image.

Gerhard Charles Rump speaks, in the publication on Michael Burges (Galerie von Braunbehrens, 2003, p.8), of the science of painting. Artists formulate new solutions without any purpose-oriented bondings. Scientists, however, make use of aesthetic formulations to achieve visibility for their findings, like in nanotechnology. Such endeavors in pictorializing science are headed imaging science. The knowledge of exact science cannot be visualized by photography but by a creative impulse. Burges is free of those bondings but still he can demonstrate physical processes through his images. Rump writes (p.15): "Their visual impact is overwhelming, as we have to constantly readjust ourselves to the changing images the painting produces. When today some physicists say that the universe could be understood as a 12-dimensional space constantly creating new universes, here we have, in the work of Michael Burges, a possible aesthetic model for such theories and processes. To bring light to these present contexts, it needs a specific attitude and its matching methods: science of painting."

In his "Werknotizen" (Notes on the works; Cologne, Berlin 1998) Burges says about his early Interference-Paintings and the convergence of physics and art: "When one talks today, following Einstein, of the space-time continuum, which brings the two quantities space and time into (mathematical) relations, dependent on energy (of motion) and gravity, it also means that one has to talk about ...'Time/Space-Patterns ... Against this scientific background these images are, of course, artistic fictions or intuitive models which reactivate the ancient but interesting problem of intuitive vs. scientific recognition." (p.8)

Each series by Michael Burges can be read, and he himself plays this through, within the context of physics, but also in the context of spiritual concepts of religion (Shunyattà-Paintings). Yet the paintings are self-referential and free in themselves, as they are not meant to be illustrations of scientific theories. They are borne by a convincing objectivity, as they demonstrate this model character. From within a renaissance of a connection of science and art shines through, which has influenced our image of man so strongly. It's only that artists, after the French Revolution, opted or had to opt out of the joint reflections (lack of consignors). Just this subjectivity gained allows an artist like Michael Burges the visual companionship and interpretation of scientific thought. Very few painters reflect this connection in their works. The spheres of values of different fields come together, although they were not meant for each other. Only an artist can demonstrate these relations, as the freedom of art permits uncommitted creations. Burges faces this challenge of the quest for innovation.

In an interview with Gerhard Finckh (Catalog Michael Burges. Malerei. Essen a. o., 1995/96. p. 32) Burges says about the phenomenon of time experienced and moments of timelessness: "For that we have the very beautiful parable in Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt'. The story about the onion. That's man. You take off one layer after the other, still it remains the same onion, the same human being, but in different gradations of time, i. e. levels of consciousness." As a painter, Burges is a thinker who is at familiar with both scientific structures and artistic poetry. He is the "scientific" painter of the skies of the worlds, which he prepares for us in a dense, new, hitherto unseen objectivity which is home to subjectivity.

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