

5 March to 12 June 2022

Der Bogen im Auge

With Luca Calaras, Sophie Esslinger, Mirjam Falkensteiner, Piet Fischer, Luca Florian, Filip Gudović, Johannes Herrmann, Minju Kang, Björn Knapp, Hidetoshi Mitsuzaki, Luc Palmer, Katharina Stadler, Andreas Steinbrecher, Denise Werth, Julian Westermann and Prof. Thomas Scheibitz

The exhibition *Der Bogen im Auge (The Curve in the Eye)* shows us images, just as its anatomical counterpart, the eye, does. More precisely, it presents paintings and objects by some of the students in Professor Thomas Scheibitz's class. These are works whose full impact is often difficult to put into words, which even call into question words themselves or language as a whole. The artists engage in experiments and pose questions about the fundamental components of pictures—color, space, and scale, composition and detail, as well as instinct, chance, and irony.[1] They open up new territory for engaging with art history, which they seek to do without reverence, yet seriously.

The curve in the eye could be the pupil or the iris. The curve that certainly catches the eye at KIT is the long, curved wall on which works by the students in Scheibitz's class are displayed in a neat line, like a gallery of ancestors or notes on sheet music, which together create a melody. They work independently and also develop a common language, with an additional level in the form of a musical installation by Julian Westermann. This overlapping and mutual reinforcement of art and music is striking: "Music is not a picture. Music is thinking about pictures," says Thomas Scheibitz, quoting Heiner Müller. The dynamic inherent in music is meant to be reflected in the artistic engagement with pictures and in the pictures themselves. The personal objects which are exhibited in two glass cabinets act appear as artefacts and inspirational sources for the artists and viewers alike.

Luca Calaras (*1998) (3, 23) describes painting as "a communicator of a hidden conceptual space" or alternatively as "a communicator of inner thought processes" that combine the inner world with everyday situations and musical excerpts in the picture.[2] The title *Self* suggests that the work is a self-portrait. The area around the eyes and mouth seems to have been erased. Although the distortion or removal of the eyes and mouth, important markers of facial expressions, is a common stylistic device in horror movies, for example, this bust does not necessarily appear threatening. Similar shapes and colors can be found in the two-part work *MOONTRASH*, which vaguely echoes the aesthetics of computer games from the early 2000s: Round shapes, goblin claws, and Minecraft-like building blocks float on the canvas as if they had been blown to pieces. This shows that the artist's personal interests, such as comics and post-punk music, flow into his works and combine inner and outer worlds into a single pictorial world.

Sophie Esslinger's, *1996, (27) paintings are characterized by dynamic brushwork, bold colors, as well as shapes and creatures that move about in a lively manner. Considering her paintings' clear contours and color contrasts, it is not surprising that Esslinger has also worked with printing methods. In painting, however, as in her work *gute nacht (fahr zur hölle)*, she likes to use large canvases as well as a gestural painting style in oil paint and turpentine to depict real things in an altered and deformed state on the canvas. She is interested in "linguistic and visual symbols as well as their alteration and overwriting." [3]

Her paintings encourage us to let our personal perception wander and to question the state of the world that is depicted: Is what unfolds on the canvas a flower or flame, dance or battle, utopia or dystopia?

In her works, **Mirjam Falkensteiner**, *1994, (1, 7) explores the visual connections between color fields, traces of paint, and drawn lines. These reflect fleeting impressions and experiences and are meant to transform into a “moment of movement” on Falkensteiner’s canvases. Personal perceptions become pictures through artistic imagination. *Sportstück* and *Horizont (nach Man Ray)* are both in their own way an examination of the panel painting, which the artist treats as image, object, and idea. The second work in particular, which occupies a large expanse on the floor in the entrance area, looks like an installation or an object that visually jumps back and forth between an analogue playing field and a digital, mathematical-looking grid, despite its two-dimensionality.

Piet Fischer, *1997, (11, 18) takes his subjects from objects and surfaces that he encounters in everyday life. Painting is a way for him to dissolve their properties and leave behind ideological meanings. For example, cars are a recurring element in his works: everyday objects that are visible everywhere and play a complex role in society. For some, cars are indispensable as status symbols or symbols of freedom, while others see them as the ultimate symbols of environmental pollution. Fischer seeks to pay attention to the object itself—its reflecting surfaces, the lights and its facial symmetry—and open up a new aesthetic and conceptual space. *Auto in Landschaft* emphasizes the painterly aspects, as does *Souvenir Inconscient*, in which the dog in front of a building merely serves as a surface for the painter to explore the interaction of shapes, colors, and shadows on.

Luca Florian, *1998, (8, 22) says about his paintings: “Many of my works, including those in the exhibition, show a central element, but the theme of these paintings is the break between the element and its natural environment, replaced with an uncanny, skeptical, alternative.”[4] In fact, the paintings exude a ghostly atmosphere, which spreads like a veil over the facial features and bodies of his figures. Florian sometimes finds his subjects in well-known works from art history, such as *Horse Frightened by Lightning* by the Impressionist Eugène Delacroix. In *Horse Frightened by Lightning (after Delacroix)*, the horse takes on the color of the stormy sky in the original and dances wide-eyed in front of a sunflower-yellow background. In Florian’s reinterpretation, the subjects are shown in a formally clear style that takes them out of their usual context and brings them into 21st-century painting. In the self-portrait *23Red*, the artist counters the observing gaze with a pose that appears both challenging and revealing. The soft brushwork gives particularly his face, which lies in half-shade, a mysterious appearance.

Filip Gudović’s, *1992, (2, 25) works initially catch the eye with their sheer richness of colors. For instance, in *CHAOS NOVA SUNSET*, rays of light wander across the canvas like disco lights and evoke a dazzling night of partying. The CDs, which the artist worked into the composition as a geometric element, are a tangible indication of the painting’s subject matter: Gudović sees the CD as a flat but potentially timeless digital medium into which events can be burned. The CD thus becomes a bearer of meaning and is also an aesthetic object on which “a spectrum of refracted light” is reflected “like light from the setting sun.”[5] *Squelch*, on the other hand, refers to the blocking out of background noise during breaks in television and radio broadcasts. The transmission of oscillation in the form of light or sound waves is an essential building block

of Gudović's works. He seeks to create a formal appearance and a degree of simulation that achieves a deep visual complexity.

Johannes Herrmann, *1982, (3, 23) deals with the fundamentals of painting, such as surface and line, which are planned in advance, but then come together so casually that they create disharmony and seem to have slipped out of place. Herrmann deliberately built these inconsistencies into the picture: "Coming from non-figurative painting, I wanted to trip myself up. To always bring opposites into line with each other, I paint space in a two-dimensional manner . . . deliberately ignorant and colorful in an old-fashioned way," he says of his working process.[6] To a certain extent, he leads us astray and then back again with his pictures, since the objects and their original state always remain recognizable. In paintings such as *Karmin* he adds a linguistic level: although a minimally depicted flame burns toward the viewer from the center of the picture, it is not the fireplace (*Kamin* in German) in perspective that gives the painting its name, but rather the crimson color (*carmine* in English) of the bricks in shadow.

Minju Kang, *1993, (10, 12) also incorporates disorienting elements into her pictures, but more on the conceptual rather than the formal level. As if photographically, following the usual parameters of realistic painting, they capture everyday moments into which unconscious emotions and memories of interactions with people flow during the painting process. There is something impenetrable about the paintings, reminiscent of dreams, and a melancholy that, like the misty gray areas in *Rainbow* and *Butt*, can penetrate to the canvas and the viewer. In the latter, a group of people stare blankly at the camera, resembling a family or vacation photo. Some of their clothes are candy-colored, and others are jet black, which makes the shadowy emptiness in the background stand out even more. In this context, it is not surprising that one of the figures has dropped their pants; on the contrary, Minju Kang makes the odd seem ordinary. What remains is something mysterious that can never be fully deciphered.

Björn Knapp's, *1988, (4, 15) oil paintings pose riddles: one moment you see landscape elements such as mountains, rock arches, and cloud formations, and the next the curve of a breast or a cheek, or the outline of a nose or a clenched fist, which stand out on the canvas. The brightly colored subjects, which combine figurative and abstract elements, come from photography, since Knapp uses spontaneous photographs as the starting point for his creative process: These black-and-white photographs are layered on top of each other and collaged. They take on their final shape and color after being transferred to the canvas. The flat color fields with only a few shaded details hardly create any three-dimensionality and yet appear surprisingly sculptural. Knapp decides against depicting a model from the perspective of the viewer, and thus avoids a resulting value judgement. Instead he works in a process that is as neutral as possible in order to dissolve (pictorial) hierarchies and the individuality of the viewer and invert them.

In his paintings, **Hidetoshi Mitsuzaki**, *1989, (5, 9) uses symbols, infographics, pictograms, and signs that are familiar as means of communication from the advertising industry as well as science and technology. These are concrete symbols and structures that point to something, although what they point to often remains vague in Mitsuzaki's work. His imagery unfolds between abstraction and figuration. It aims to detach itself from the origin of its subjects, reassembles them, and thus suggests new relationships, references, and questions. In Mitsuzaki's works, their interaction achieves an unexpected complexity, which at the same time seems to follow a clear order. By repeatedly referring to means of classifying and understanding,

Mitsuzaki acknowledges empiricism in an ambiguous way: After all, what is a system of measurement worth if we don't know what it measures?

Luc Palmer, *1995, (13, 14) works in drawing, painting, and sculpture, transforming forms mostly taken from nature into independent images, which occasionally still hint at their origins. He is concerned with questions about depiction and its formal accuracy as well as conceptual ambiguities. *Dioxfuran* and *iniuria via 4* have commonalities on both levels: formally, the line immediately catches the eye as a motif and element that directs the gaze. It can appear both as the trail of an animal—a snail or an insect, for example—and as digital or technical interference. The titles of the two works open up another facet: While *iniuria* describes an illegal act, *Dioxfuran* is made up of the words “dioxin” and “dibenzofuran”—both chemical substances that are produced when hazardous waste or forests are burned and which accumulate in the bodies of animals and humans. These traces in the body then run through Palmer's paintings in expressive colors, combining humor and melancholy.

Katharina Stadler, *1995, (17, 19) is interested in topics such as hierarchy and everyday life, poetry and prose, aesthetics and reality, which she explores in an abstract visual language. Some figurative elements are mixed with abstract shapes and highly pigmented colors to create surfaces that often emanate an emotional calm. The gentle gradients can appear as clear as the water that serves as the basis for Stadler's paints, while curved lines and intense color spaces determine their compositions and perhaps even make the concentration of feelings and thoughts visible. The works on cotton that she is showing in the exhibition demonstrate this range of Stadler's paintings: while in *Memory* energetic, seemingly agitated lines allude to a jumble of thoughts, the brightly colored areas in *Rituals* are reminiscent of a stained-glass window, which can symbolize places of silence and reflection.

Andreas Steinbrecher, *1984, (20, 21) moves between figurative and abstract painting, which he prepares for with portfolios, sketchbooks, and image archives. While some of his works are precisely planned and composed, others are created intuitively and in an unplanned, lengthy process. Subjects from art history, 19th-century natural history books, and music serve as inspiration. In its elliptical form, *All Ihr Kreaturen* ties in with common forms of portrait painting and, in addition to schematically depicted animal heads, shows an angel who radiates serenity amid slaving wolf mouths. By painting over his preliminary sketch with bright white and giving his figures a flat appearance with clear lines, Steinbrecher aims to give the painting a digital feel. Something similar is the case with *Double Vision*, in which the shape of an ellipse appears again as a pair of eyes, or at least as a structuring pictorial element: Here the brushstrokes, which are in some places blurred and in others clearly defined, oscillate between drawing and painting and sometimes even run into empty space when they are interrupted by circular holes in the canvas.

Denise Werth, *1988, (24, 30) devotes her attention to the signs and symbols of visual language and the relationships between form, depiction, and object. Based on drawing and painting, she creates sculptures made of lacquer, plaster, plastic, and MDF, which to a certain extent seem like ambiguous images: the process begins with an image or a shape that is increasingly abstracted and reduced until it is precise and open enough to create new ideas and to resemble completely different objects. Her works can only be deciphered up close and in relation to the personal and social visual memory—without the expectation of encountering a single truth. The titles of the works, such as *Spade*, indicate what they depict, but the works could also be viewed in a completely different way—perhaps as an arrowhead, a tree-shaped air

freshener, or a perfume bottle. *Wearable*, on the other hand, with the light-absorbing look of a black marker, initially seems like a direct reference to the two-dimensional lettering itself, but can also be carried around like a suitcase or an oversized portfolio.

Julian Westermann, *1991, (29) creates objects and their corresponding worlds, which can exist autonomously and collectively. They sometimes take the form of a stage set that Westermann can use for music or performances: “Musical works grow between my own wilderness of symbolic creation, which as pop songs are juxtaposed with my fragile and spontaneously situated objects in a repellent and at the same time strangely harmonious way.” [7] Materials such as goose feathers, textiles, and stainless steel develop a naturalistic, dystopian scenery that evokes magical realism and traces of (nature) spirits, urban ghosts, and rituals. For KIT he developed an audio installation whose title *no safe bullet catch* makes use of a German phrase used in hunting. [8] The translation into English is meant to distance the title from its original meaning without completely departing from it.

In his paintings, sculptures and drawings, **Thomas Scheibitz**, *1968, (6) circles around the relationship between the figurative and the abstract, between the well known and the invented. “If you see my works, it should . . . ideally be the case that the moment you see it for the first time you have the impression that you have never seen anything like it before, and in the same second you feel that it does in fact remind you of something,” he says. [9] He achieves this by distilling his own archive of forms from contemporary imagery, which includes clippings from newspapers and advertisements, playing cards, pictograms, as well as motifs from comics, theater, and film. He uses this to develop his own system of signs, which ties in with our individual visual memory and yet remains continually surprising. The moment you think you can see something clearly, it can disappear. This is also the case in *Auge*, which was especially created for the exhibition: it shows a red eye, which can dissolve into something intangible behind a white spot, surrounded by abstract shapes.

Website for Scheibitz’s class: <http://klassescheibitz.de>

¹ Thomas Scheibitz, 2021.

² Luca Calaras, 2022.

³ Sophie Esslinger, 2022.

⁴ Luca Florian, 2022.

⁵ Filip Gudović, 2022.

⁶ Johannes Hermann, 2021.

⁷ Julian Westermann, 2021.

⁸ The German expression “Kein sicherer Kugelfang” refers to the fact that a bullet can ricochet off of the ground or trees in the surroundings and thus endanger others.

⁹ Thomas Scheibitz: “Die Kunst von Thomas Scheibitz: Abstrakte Verführung,” on *ZDF aspekte*, 2 February 2018.

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