

The Painter Eckehard Fuchs

Some Thoughts Concerning Style and Emotion

“I try to track down my own afterimages.” With these words, Eckehard Fuchs distills his painterly and graphic strategies. Afterimages are phenomena which belong to the realm of physiology as well as to cognitive psychology. Even after the sensory stimulus has passed, visual impressions continue to affect us as retinal projections. For Eckehard Fuchs, this equally applies to emotional impressions and their after effects.

The degree of abstraction in optical afterimages is reflected in the simplified and often severe contours of Fuchs' images, with their psychological depth of focus playing a part in these very same effects as well, intensified by the high-contrast, even garish colour palette. His series of collages from 2004 provided the technical catalyst for his pictorial language, which is rich with breaks and not yet disentangled knots and tensions. The artist layered drawings with torn-out elements, constructed pictorial architectures out of coloured strips, literally unravelling the motifs as he developed them — and he has remained true to this technique in his later paintings. Without a doubt, such themes as the bandaging, wrapping and unwrapping of figures have resulted from this layering, with all the related iconography coming along for the ride.

The physical and psychic intensity of such mummifications and embraces often verges on the unbearable. However, the expressiveness of Eckehard Fuchs' constellations of figures is only partly rooted in these structural characteristics. Body language, facial expressions and interactions create additional references which have become rather rare in current figurative work: the crude woodcut qualities of Expressionism are paired with the indiscrete ruthlessness of verism and a sometimes striking directness of politically motivated realism. In this clear rejection of a superficial or intentionally emotionless figurative style (which the current success story of certain regional schools of painting repeatedly recounts), there is a personal courage that goes far beyond a simple stylistic intention, speaking for an existential self-investigation.

Again and again, in both his paintings and in his gouache drawings, Eckehard Fuchs uses classical pictorial methods that he has systematically 'soaked up' from the old Masters. Piero della Francesca and Pietro Longhi are his favourites, and there are indeed many parallels to be discovered here. Although almost 300 years separate the work of these two Italian painters, both dealt with the human figure in quite unique and non-idealistic ways. Whereas Piero's protagonists seem statuesque and compact, Pietro's characters are said to have the

quality of 'stuffed marionettes' with the 'appearance of sarcophagal mummy portrait paintings' (Roberto Longhi, Venetian Painting). Eckehard Fuchs' intense settings are characterized by a doll-like and calculatedly disproportional quality: the refusal to employ conventional ideal proportions is intentional. Expressions and gestures are grotesquely exaggerated, and, according to the artist, are meant to be "more realistic and credible than a skin which resists penetration."

The rather clumsy and awkward manner of the figures, their torpid ritualistic actions, and elements of so-called 'psychological perspective' in these images all refer to even older sources of inspiration than the Italian Renaissance and the twentieth century. Eckehard Fuchs likes to mention being inspired by Romanesque paintings, but gothic influences are equally evident. There is a similarity in the way that any possible identification of the viewer with the depicted must occur via the archetypes and stereotypes being used. Portrait-like representation is refused, as more and more actors show up and become physically involved in the narrative and composition. Consequently, it is not uncommon to hear mention of themes of the mask and masquerade. The problem of dual identity or the alter ego is therefore not surprising in this context: numerous versions of twins, sometimes melting together Siamese-style, stand for this.

Human prototypes are subjected to physical and psychic declension exercises, all in the service of a perpetual 'Comedie Humaine'.

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